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NINA STOOD STARING AT THE HOPELESSLY DEGRADED WRETCH BEFORE HER.

DUDLEY ERRINGTON'S SECRETARY.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

COUSIN GODFREY.

"WELL!" said Cousin Godfrey.

"Well!" Nina echoed, vaguely.

"Is that all you've got to say?" came next, impatiently.

Nina looked at Godfrey where he sat, astride across one shabby chair, his arms folded on the back of another, the picture of a gentleman ne'er-do-well—good-looking, irresolute, with short, fretful upper lip, and effeminate chin; his

limbs inert, like those of a man who never hardens his muscles with work; the very expression of his face idle, purposeless. And, somehow, as Nina looked, it crossed her, by no means for the first time, what such men as Godfrey were born for? They are burdens, not burden carriers; they are like flies—stealing the fruit of others' labour, and perpetually in the way. They are beyond contempt; for "they toil not, neither do they spin," yet spend like water the money they have not earned, and then demand—not even ask—for more!

Godfrey and Nina Lovell had been brought up together like brother and sister; but the sexes were more than reversed in many ways. He was idle, self indulgent, and selfish from the days of his boyhood unto this day, and he was twenty-six now.

His mother, Nina's aunt, adored him; and Nina adored her, or else she would never have promised her, in her last illness, to stand by Godfrey always.

"He is weak, dear Nina," she said; "and you are strong. He needs a guide and helper."

Yes; but she might have taught him that it is a man's place to work, to look to himself; to act on principle, and not on impulse; to look the world in the face, and not sit down and play hazard while other people fight his battles and their own. Yet that was Nina's lot!

The two cousins were left poor—alone in the world, without a friend to turn to. They had to work—at least Nina had. Godfrey never dreamed of such a thing; and certainly he wasn't fit for much.

Nina got him a clerk's place once, and he

threw it up in a fortnight. He went late, idled at his work, and when reprobated was insolent. He could not stand "drudgery!" he said, and the work was *infra dig*.

But he didn't mind Nina casting up accounts in a newspaper office, or translating German and Latin for a pittance. The girl had worked hard since she was nineteen—four years ago—keeping both of them, in a fashion.

Godfrey used to win money at cards sometimes; but Nina never saw it. Of course, they had to live to some extent apart, being cousins, which made it more expensive; but Nina got no help from her admirable relative.

And now she was out of employment, and so both were "stranded." The girl owed a week's rent for the one small room she occupied, in Camden Town; and now Godfrey had come in to tell her he hadn't "a red cent," and he might get turned out of his room, in a street hard by.

"What do you expect me to say?" was Nina's remark, after the brief survey above recorded.

"Expect! I didn't say I expected anything? You're in a jolly bad humour this morning, Nina. Can't you do anything to help a fellow?"

"I owe my own rent," she answered, rising and crossing the room to the window. "I have a few shillings owing to me, and I am going out presently to try and get them. But I can't pay your rent with that money!"

"Let me go and get the tin for you, Nina?"

"No thanks!" she said, coldly. "I'll go myself."

"Oh, very well!" said Godfrey irritably, and getting up as he spoke. "I suppose you think I'd walk off with the tin?"

As that was precisely what Nina did think, she held her peace.

Godfrey stamped about for several minutes, and his cousin gazed drearily out into the street. She had left her last situation—which was serving out newspapers, at a large news-vendor's in the City, (shades of all the knightly Lovells!)—ostensibly to make room for a relation of the proprietors', but really, as she couldn't help seeing, because young Dick Scatbear took it into his caroty head to "pay attention" to her; and the "firm" were afraid of his marrying a penniless girl.

As if Nina would have looked at a man so infinitely beneath her—a man without birth, breeding, or grammar! The "firm" might as well have thought she would smile on the crossing-sweeper or the sweep!

However, she was dismissed, with about fifteen shillings owing to her; and she was going this afternoon to get it.

Presently Godfrey began:

"You ought to marry, Nina! a tall, slim, handsome girl like you! I haven't seen your equal yet, blessed if I have!"

"Handsome is that handsome has!" said she. "I am very likely to marry! and I'm sure I don't care to!"

"You're a match for any man!" said Godfrey, with a pride that somehow struck the girl as ludicrous, so at war was it with the poverty-struck room, and their almost destitute condition.

Nina burst out laughing.

"Do you remember what a witty barrister said once, Godfrey? 'A barrister is fit company for the Queen; meanwhile he lives on a beefsteak, and is lucky if he gets that.' A Lovell in a top-floor is like a lily thrown into a dust-bin!"

"You're a regular pessimist, Nina?" said Godfrey, impatiently.

Then he went up to her, and pushed his hands through her hair, which was dark brown, and clustered over her head in short curls, and he muttered something about her "glorious dark eyes," and turned away.

He talked in that strain sometimes; but Nina was not in the least flattered by such

speeches. They reappeared sometimes, further embellished, in so-called poems, which he scribbled and read to his cousin, under the idea that they might be accepted by some publisher.

They weren't very much worse than the average poetry in the shilling monthlies; and having said that, no more need be said.

"I am going for my money," Nina said. "So, good-bye!"

And she left the room, put on her hat, and went out.

She walked to the City; lucky for her she was strong, and an excellent pedestrian. She could not afford to spend her pence on omnibuses.

Messrs. Scarbear were in a street off Cheapside, and Nina saw one of the heads of the firm, who was very affable, and having paid her the money due to her, asked her what she was doing now.

"Nothing!" she answered. "I am on the look-out for employment."

"Could you copy plays?"

"Of course I could," returned Nina, promptly.

She had never done it, but knew she could, with a few hints. Her handwriting was particularly clear and bold in character—not at all like a woman's hand.

"Well, give me a specimen of your writing, and I may be able to do something for you in that way. The way isn't much, but it's better than nothing. Come into the counting-house, and write out a page."

Nina followed the speaker, and drawing off her glove sat down and wrote out the mercy speech from the *Merchant of Venice*.

"All right!" said Mr. Scatbear. "I'll do what I can for you."

"Many thanks!" said Nina. "I shall be obliged to you if you can get me only a little work."

And she departed, not supposing for a minute that Mr. Scatbear meant to take any trouble, or that if he did, any good would come of it. Experience had, naturally enough, made her cynical. Promises are so big, and performances so little!

And days went by, and she heard no more of Mr. Scatbear and his play copying. The fifteen shillings had become one; and when that was gone, what was Nina Lovell to do?

"I shall go down to the Emigration Office to-morrow," she said, within herself, "and see if one could get a free passage out to Australia. I should have to work as a servant there; but that is better than starvation here!"

CHAPTER II.

THE FAMOUS DRAMATIST.

"LETTER for you, miss!" said a shocked-headed "marchioness," popping her head unceremoniously into Nina's room, and stretching out a letter which bore her thumb-mark in one corner.

It was the last post at night, and Nina was sitting in the light of a tallow candle, thinking out her emigration scheme.

She took the letter, and looked at it—thick, cream-laid, with a crest of two crossed daggers on the seal, and addressed to her on the back in a free, masculine hand—a literary, not a "business" or "commercial" hand.

"Who could it be from?" Nina thought; but she broke open the envelope, and read the following dated from "35, Adelphi-terrace."

DEAR MADAM,—

"Mr. Denver, stage manager of the Apollo Theatre, informs me that you are willing to undertake the copying of plays, and he enclosed to me a specimen of your handwriting, with which I was very pleased.

"If you are able to do other literary work I may have some to offer you, especially if you are a good German scholar. At present I have a few plays to be copied out. The usual rate of payment is, as you are, perhaps, aware, five

shillings per act; but I have no objection to paying well, so long as I obtain what I need above all things—*thorough* work. If I am correctly informed as to your wishes, will you kindly favour me with a call to-morrow between eleven and twelve?

"I am, dear madam,

"Yours faithfully,
DUDLEY STRANGE ERRINGTON."

Dudley Errington, the famous dramatist, the author of the great drama which was drawing the town at a leading London theatre, at this very minute! Fancy working for him! And oh! what luck to get any work at all! But the work was not her's yet!

Nina paused; and her face, all aglow just now, fell.

Mr. Errington might be under the impression that she was used to the kind of work, and when she owned her inexperience have nothing more to say to her. But, oh, dear! if this chance only would "turn up trumps," what a fortunate girl she would be! And then, if she satisfied him by her work, he was actually willing to pay more than the current price.

He must be an eccentric man, Nina thought. She had never before known anyone guilty of a Quixotism of that sort. And then she both read and spoke German, and was a good Latin scholar besides, so she might suit Mr. Errington.

She knew nothing of the dramatist personally—whether he was married or single, tall or short, handsome or ugly; and she cared nothing about any of these points.

The thing was, would he employ her?

Then came a pang of remorse, Scatbear had been as good as his word after all, and had spoken for her to some purpose, for Nina did not know "Mr. Denver" from Adam.

She went to bed with a brighter hope, and woke in the morning with the load on her heart considerably lessened.

Did her attire, she wondered ruefully, as she dressed for her appointment, look very shabby?

She was not aware how much her tall figure and graceful bearing, her "glorious dark eyes," and the general charm of a striking countenance, set off clothes that would have looked shabby on most women.

She had carefully mended her gloves, and blacked over one or two places on her boots where the leather was somewhat worn; so boots and gloves looked respectable, which was much gained. *Bien chaussée, bien ganté*, is a wise maxim.

Gifted people, Nina said to herself, as she walked down to the Strand, are generally disappointing in their *personnel*. Mr. Errington would probably turn out to be a slovenly, heavily-bearded man, plain to look upon, and much addicted to smoking.

He must be forty, at least, by the way, if not more, for Nina remembered hearing that his first play was produced when he was quite a young man, and the date of the production was twenty years ago.

Her heart beat a wee bit faster as she knocked at the door of thirty-five, where she was not kept waiting, a man-servant almost instantly appearing.

"Is Mr. Errington at home?" the girl asked. "I am Miss Lovell?"

"Yes, miss; this way, please."

He showed her up a broad staircase, and opened the door of a small room at the top, where, placing a chair for her, he withdrew, and left her alone.

Nina looked round her; but there was not much to see.

A table, a few chairs, a huge bookcase full of books, some busts of dramatic worthies, and photographs of actors and actresses, and over the mantelpiece a painting of Edmund Kean as Richard III.

Nina was still looking at this, not moving

from her chair to do so, when the gentle opening of the door made her turn round; and she saw, not a "heavily-bearded," slovenly man, plain to look upon, but a tall, slightly made, decidedly handsome man, guiltless of beard, though wearing a moustache, with curly, dark hair, just fringed with grey on the temples, and very brilliant hazel eyes. Also, he did not look over five-and-thirty, and was well dressed; an aristocratic-looking man, who had a right, one would say, to the crest that appeared on his paper. Nor was there any suggestion of tobacco smoke about him.

"How kind of you to call!" he said, holding out his hand as Nina rose (well, there was something eccentric about him, at any rate!). "Sit down, please, and let's have a chat over the play-copying business. Have you ever done anything of the kind before?"

"No!" Nina said, colouring a little. "I ought to explain that, Mr. Errington. Mr. Scatbear, who I suppose, kindly mentioned me to Mr. Denver, asked me if I could copy plays, and I said, 'Yes,' because I was sure I could. I did not mean him to understand that I had ever done it!"

"You spoke like a sensible girl, Miss Lovell!" said Dudley Errington, smiling. "I perceive that in your lexicon there's no such word as fail. You're intelligent enough to do anything you have set your mind to. But there's nothing very occult in copying plays. I can tell you what to do, and it will be all right, I know!"

What an odd man he was! Nina could not help laughing.

"You are very kind!" she said. "I can certainly promise what you require so much—thorough work."

"That is the character Denver gave you, through Scatbear, Miss Lovell," said the dramatist, "and you look it. You know, it's not a very common quality with either your sex or mine—but less with yours; but you are a woman of business, and given that desideratum, I prefer a woman—a lady—for my work, to a man. They are steady, trustworthy; they don't go to supper parties, and get up at twelve o'clock the next day too seedy for work. When they make a promise they keep it, and don't have sick relations turning up at odd times to account for sudden flights from town."

Nina laughed out—it was impossible to keep a grave face. Errington laughed too. Then he said,—

"But I must not take up your time talking nonsense. Tell me, do you know any foreign languages?"

"Latin and German, thoroughly. I have translated from them!"

"Well done! You are a trump card, Miss Lovell! What was your work at Scatbear's?"

"I served out the papers," said Nina, without hesitation, and without any shame in owning the fact.

"Do you mean that you served out to the trade over the counter?"

"Yes!"

"Well!" said Errington, drily, "I call that using a Nasmyth hammer to crush egg-shells. What work for an intellectual girl like you!"

"I had to live, you see," said Nina simply. "Unless you agree with Fouché."

"Certainly not, in your case, Miss Lovell, though I am afraid I do in many. Then you think you would like to try my work?"

"Yes! Indeed I should! if you think I can satisfy you."

"Oh! I am pretty sure of that; but I shall soon prove you. And about terms—oh! by the way, should you object to working here? You see, there is always some danger in carrying MSS. to and fro."

"What objection could I have, Mr. Errington? I would rather not run any risks."

"Thank you so much. You could have this

room to yourself, and if we get on together—and I am sure we shall—I daresay I can give you lots of work to do. I am in sore want of someone to help me whom I can really trust; but I have not found the *rara avis* yet. You know what it is generally—other people doing your work means that you have to do it twice over."

"That is true enough," said Nina. "Well, I will do my best. It is no use saying more, as you don't know me yet."

Errington gave her a look so keen as to make her feel she would not care to face him if she had anything to hide, and smiled.

"You are made of the right metal," he said.

"Now, once more, as to terms."

"I must leave that to you, Mr. Errington. You said the usual terms were—"

"Too low for the work," he interrupted, rising. "Then you will leave that matter to me? I think you will find it safe in my hands; if not, you must tell me so!"

"You are very kind, Mr. Errington."

"Don't say that," he said, gravely, "until you have proved me. Will you come to my study, please, and I will show you the right way to copy plays?"

The dramatist's "study" was a large room, with three windows looking to the river, and what a room! What a delightful one to Nina, who, not having anything of the "hat-tail" in her composition, was not at all dismayed by the untidiness that reigned.

Writing-table—what a glorious writing-table!—covered with M S S., letters, books, photos, literary odds-and-ends innumerable; handsome furniture, and rich draperies, beautiful paintings, and statuettes; a book-case, filling one entire side of the room, and every shelf full; cabinets; a mantel-piece to the ceiling, a gem of elaborate wood-carving—beautiful things of all kinds; but it was clearly a bachelor's room, or the profane—that is, tidy-hand—of woman was never allowed to rule over it. Doubtless, to the dramatist, "order" in that apartment would be chaos.

He went to the writing-table, and took up a M S. lying on it.

"This is a three-act piece," he said, "which I have just finished. I want it copied quickly, but without hurry."

He then proceeded to show Nina how the work was to be done; and arranged with her to come the following day, at ten in the morning, and work until one, and then commence again at two, and go on until four.

Nina departed, feeling as if her heart was an india-rubber ball—youth is so easily lifted out of the depths to the heights; and Dudley Errington, left alone, sat down, and passed his shapely hand thoughtfully through his curly hair.

"What a relief it will be," he said to himself. "If the girl proves up to the mark all the way round! I think she will. What a lovely—well, it's far more than lovely—what a charming face—mind, as well as heart! Fancy that girl serving out newspapers! What a topsy-turvy world we live in!"

And he turned to his work again, and by-and-by betook himself to the little room which Nina was to have, to see how he could make it more comfortable for her. It looked a bare sort of place for a lady to sit in all day.

Dudley Errington was a gentleman to the core, and never forgot the deference which, in his code, was due to women, whether they worked for their living or not.

CHAPTER III.

EMPLOYER AND EMPLOYEE.

"Got a berth to copy plays for Errington, have you? When?" said Godfrey Lovell, that afternoon, when this cousin told him of the fact, which she would have kept from him

had it been possible. "You're in luck, my dear!"

Which meant, "I am in luck!"

"Play copying isn't a fortune, Godfrey."

"No. But it pays jolly well, doesn't it?"

"You ought to know that no copying pays well, and I daresay I shall not have much of this to do."

"Oh! he'll find you other work," said Godfrey, with the confidence of the idle and lazy in the "luck" of the working bees. "And you do the work at his house? Can you spare me half-a-crown, Nina? I haven't a rap."

"And I no more, Godfrey. I don't possess the sum you ask for."

"A shilling's better than nothing."

"Maybe; but a shilling is all I have."

Even Godfrey was shamed into silence by this reply; but he rose with a frown, as if Nina's poverty was her fault, and, without a word more, flung out of the room.

"I shall have to tell him," muttered the girl through her teeth, "that he *must* work—that I can't keep him and myself too any longer. But, somehow, I always fear to do that. I don't trust him. I daresay think what he might do to get money. He would assuredly prefer anything to hard work."

She shuddered, and, rising hurriedly, went to fetch a ribbon with which she thought she might improve the appearance of her hat.

And the next morning she set out for Adelphi-terrace, and arrived there a few minutes before ten. The servant, acting probably by orders, showed her up to his master's study; and Errington, already at work, rose from the table to greet her, taking her hand with a cordial, friendly clasp.

"Good morning!" he said. "Your work is all ready for you, Miss Lovell, and I hope you will like the room. But if there is anything lacking, please let me know."

"I am sure to like it, Mr. Errington," answered the girl, not really supposing that he meant more than a polite *facos de parler*.

He saw that, and said,—

"But I am speaking seriously. I want you to be comfortable in your sanctum. Will you come with me now, please?"

What a metamorphosis had been wrought in the apartment! It hardly seemed the same. She looked round her wondering, and then raised grateful eyes to her employer's face.

"I am sure nothing can be nicer, Mr. Errington—and what a glorious fire! You are too kind!"

"I am rather a chilly mortal," he said, smiling. "I find this country so damp. I have lived a good deal in Italy. I thought you might like a good deal of warmth."

"I do, indeed. Thank you very much."

Errington showed her what he wanted done, and left her. And she worked away earnestly and carefully, and found the employment very interesting, for the play she was copying was, like all the dramatist's work, of a high order, and Nina quite enjoyed reading it.

She quite forgot, indeed, how the time went, and started when a knock came at the door.

"Come in!" she said, and Errington entered.

"How are you getting on?" he asked. "Do you know that it is past one?"

"Is it? I got so interested; I didn't notice the time."

He came to her side, and looked over the work.

"Couldn't be better," he said. "You'll do, Miss Lovell. Now, you must go and have some luncheon. Good-morning for the present."

Nina's luncheon that day was a cup of coffee and a bun. It was all she could afford. Errington evidently also lunched out, for she met him coming out as she was returning. He raised his hat and smiled as he passed her; but he turned and looked after her, and bit his lip with a rather perplexed air as he went on.

"I wonder if it will do!" he muttered, in-

wardly. "The girl is uncommonly handsome. I don't want to get her talked about. But it seems a shame a capable woman shouldn't earn her living because she happens to be better-looking than the ordinary run of people. She can't have had much of a luncheon; she's back so quick. I'm afraid she's hard up. Good heavens! the world is sadly out of joint."

He had known personally a good deal of the up-and-downs of life. He mixed daily with men and women who knew them, and his very profession necessitated and fostered close observation of life in all its phases.

So that evening, before Nina went, he came into the study, and said that he would pay her that day for that day's work, and so on to the end of the week, which was a broken one—this being Wednesday—and then they could consider what would be the most convenient mode of payment to her.

Nina felt the tears rise in her throat as she thanked her employer, for she was sure he divined something of the truth, and took this thoughtful mode of relieving her. Most grateful was she for the money, for she was now penniless. She found that his remuneration was on a very liberal scale, so much so that she was afraid he had misunderstood the amount of work done.

"I only had that comedy to copy, Mr. Errington," she said; "and a few extracts from—"

But he interrupted her, laughing,—

"You are painfully conscientious, Miss Lovell. But it's all right. I believe in paying by work, and not by sex."

"You're the only employer I ever had," said Nina, "who looks at in that light."

"More's the pity. Now, you must 'knock off,' as the workmen say. You have been at it pretty close."

Nina opened her eyes.

"I am used to much longer hours than that," she said.

"I daresay you are. Perhaps that is why you are so pale. Would you like tickets for the theatre to-night?"

Nina's face lighted up. A theatre was a treat she could rarely afford.

"Oh, yes!" she said. "Very much indeed!"

"Now, if you don't mind coming to my study when you are ready to go, I'll give you tickets for the Haymarket. You would prefer that, wouldn't you, to the Gaiety, or Prince of Wales's? You don't look as if you would care for burlesque or comic opera."

Nina could not help laughing.

"I don't care for them," said she. "But how did you know that?"

"Oh! one can tell," he answered, laughing. "Anyhow, I was right!"

He went out to his study, and presently Nina followed him there. He was sitting by the table, but rose as she entered, and gave her the seat.

"Please ask me," he said, "any time you would like to go to the theatre. I can always let you have seats for some theatre."

"You are too kind," said Nina. "I shouldn't like to ask. You have so many claims upon you."

"Plenty of people who have no claims, but make them—very few who have, and you are among the few."

"I can't see that!" said Nina.

"You are a study!" said Errington, looking at her with a curious gravity. "I shall have to put you into a play. Very well; I see what you are. You'll never ask for what you want. I shall have to find out."

"Please don't take the trouble. I never can ask people for anything," said Nina, half-apologetically; "especially when they are kind and considerate."

"You won't get on in the world, Miss Lovell. You are too sensitive—too proud. You must

push and bully, and buttonhole and brag. That's the way to climb the ladder!"

"You didn't do it that way," said Nina.

"You can't know anything about it. You were scarcely more than born when I was climbing up the ladder!"

"Yes; but I have read! Besides—"

"I don't look it! Is that in revenge for the burlesque and comic opera? Anyhow, exceptions only prove the rule!"

"Then you admit the exception?"

"Are there any Irish Lovells? You must be one of them," said Errington. "I give it up!"

He let her go then, though he would fain have detained her, and hoped she would enjoy herself to-night, wishing he could be with her; but that must be when they knew each other better.

CHAPTER IV.

A MATINEE.

NINA was now established in Adelphi-terrace as a regular secretary.

Errington gave her a lot of his business correspondence as well as other work, and found her so efficient that he told her one day he should not know what to do without her.

It chanced once that, wanting to finish some letters to catch the country post, she remained at work until past five. Another evening Errington asked her to remain until six, to do some special work. When Saturday came she found that he had paid for the extra hours; and on Monday she mentioned it to him.

"I would rather you didn't do that, Mr. Errington," she said. "I was only too pleased too stay."

"And so you want me to accept more than I bargained for?" said he, smiling.

"No, it wouldn't be that; one never draws a hard-and-fast line."

"I do, in such things. Suppose, since I have so much for you to do now, that you stay till five every day, except Saturday, at a proportionate increase of salary?"

"Very well, Mr. Errington; that is, at my present salary."

"Certainly not. It must be on my terms, please."

Nina opened her lips to protest, but Errington laid his hand lightly, yet imperatively on hers.

"That is settled, then," he added, quietly. "Thanks, Miss Lovell."

"It is I who am your debtor," she said, a quiver in her soft voice.

"You think so?" and then they parted.

Errington stifled a sigh as he turned back to his desk. He did not feel like much steady work this evening, and so gave it up, and presently went out.

He had given Nina seats for the Vaudeville for that night, and a little before eight he turned into the lobby to speak to the acting manager on some matter of dramatic business.

The people were streaming into the house, and Errington's quick eye suddenly caught sight of Nina. But who was the fair, *blonde*, do-nothing-looking fellow with her.

Errington detected, even in that swift survey, much of the sort of man Godfrey was; and something very like a pang went to the dramatist's heart. Who was this man? What was he to Nina Lovell?

The girl, seeing that Errington was talking to someone, was passing him with a bow and smile, but he turned and shook hands with her; and Godfrey, who had never seen the dramatist, gave him a look, guessing who he was.

When Nina joined him again he said in a low voice,—

"That was Errington, of course? He's deucedly good-looking, isn't he?"

"Yes," she answered. "Why shouldn't he be?" for there was some resentment in her cousin's tone.

"Oh! it's all the better for him," said Godfrey, and Nina said no more.

She wished it was Errington sitting by her rather than her cousin, who was not the most intellectual of companions.

Errington himself would not have objected to the exchange.

"Surely," he mused, as he walked along the Strand, "that fellow can't be her—can't be anything to the girl? There's nothing in common between them—nothing. He looks invertebrate; and he's a dissipated scamp, if ever there was one."

He had certainly become very much interested in Nina's future welfare!

Two or three days after this Errington entered his secretary's study with some letters which he wished her to answer. One of these was to a famous and charming actress, who had written to ask Mr. Errington if he could manage to interest himself on her behalf to get her a seat for Denning's matinée. There wasn't a seat to be had.

The matinée in question was the production of a poetic play, about which a great amount of public expectation had been raised. It was superbly cast, some of the leading artists of the day being engaged, forming a galaxy of talent rarely to be met with in one theatre.

Seats were, therefore, at a premium, and many people who usually got free passes were constrained to pay for places or not go at all.

"Will you write and tell Miss Gresham, please," said Errington, "that I am very sorry, but I really have no power in the matter. There are no more seats to be had, for love or money. Absurdly late to write," he added, "as the matinée is to-morrow. Shall I wait while you write the letter, and I will sign it; Miss Gresham will take huff if I don't."

Nina smiled, and wrote the letter; and Errington took it and glanced over it.

"You have put it in sugar and honey!" he said. "Poor Kate Gresham!"

He took up the pen and signed the letter, and as he gave it back to Nina, and rose, he said,—

"Would you like to go to the matinée tomorrow, Miss Lovell? There is a stall at your service, if you will allow me the honour of escorting you."

Nina flushed high with mingled pleasure and astonishment, and raised wondering eyes to her employer's face.

It did not seem as if she could have understood him aright, for he had just refused this acknowledged favourite.

Why not have offered her the stall?

"Mr. Errington—" she began, and stopped dead.

He smiled; his heart was beating rather fast just now, but he kept perfect command over his face.

"That means yes, I hope!" he said.

"Oh, but," said Nina, "it is too kind of you. I must be robbing someone!"

"You are robbing no one. It will give me the greatest pleasure if you will come!"

"I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Errington. Of course I should like to go above everything."

"I am your debtor," said he, and then he left her; and when he was gone Nina paused a few moments, her mind in a little confusion. If it had been possible to put the vague feeling within her into words, she might have said,—

"He must know dozens of women who would have been ready to go on their knees to him for that place, and he offers it to me! Why does he do that?"

But the feeling did not take shape—did not even get so far as thought. What Nina did think was, that it was an act of extreme kindness on her employer's part. He wished, perhaps, to give some special "treat" to the trusted girl-secretary who had worked hard and con-

scientiously for him. But then he was always kind and generous to her.

"I hate to think," the girl mused, "that I am displacing someone he likes, or would wish to oblige."

She put on her best "bib and tucker" the next day, and was wondering, about one o'clock, if she could find time to run out and get a little refreshment before she would be wanted, when there was a tap at the door, and Errington came in.

"Good morning?" he said shaking hands, and thinking how charming she looked in that "Marguerite" sort of gown. "Can you be ready in about a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes?"

"If you wish it. Has the time of the matinée been altered?" asked Nina, with just a little pang for the long fast she would have to keep.

"No, it plays at 2.30. But I suppose you would like some luncheon?" said Errington, with a rather quizzical smile.

"Thanks; yes. But then you don't want me yet?" said Nina, a little puzzled.

"Yes, I do, please, if you will honour me. We can lunch at —'s, and go on to the theatre."

"I shall be very happy," Nina said. She could not well have refused if she had wished to do so, for Errington had put in this part of the programme as if it were a foregone conclusion; and there seemed to be no reason why she should refuse, so when he came back in a quarter of an hour she was ready for him.

"I shall not be able to finish this after the matinée?" she said, half questioningly, touching a M S. on the table.

"Miss Lovell, you are incorrigible! You will do no more work to-day."

And Nina had to yield.

Was the girl most happy that day, or the man? It was a new and delightful experience to her, this lunching at a restaurant with a delightful companion, and the pleasant prospect of the play to follow; but to him the newness of the "experience" depended entirely upon his *ris-d-vis*, and his prospect beyond was far more concerned with the dark-eyed girl who would sit by his side than with play or players, and this was saying a good deal for so keen a critic and enthusiast in dramatic affairs as Dudley Errington.

Not that he said it quite so plainly to himself. Even a man of the world does not always at first fully recognise how much a woman is to him; but he was very distinctly conscious that he would not have given up Nina's society for that of any creature in the world.

In the theatre it seemed to Nina that her companion knew everybody, and it might be safely said that he did know everybody who was anybody; and that was delightful for Nina, for he showed her all the celebrities in the fashionable as well as the professional world.

Nina, on the other hand, was an object of envy, admiration, and surprise.

"Who the Dickens?" was asked, "is that awfully pretty girl with Errington?"

She was confidently declared to be a dozen different notabilities to several people who came to speak to Errington between the acts.

He introduced her as "Miss Lovell," and it did not escape Nina that three or four of these were ladies of established repute, to whom no man would dream of introducing anyone on whose name a shadow could rest.

Of course Errington had to go behind once to speak to the artists, but he was not long absent, and when he returned apologised for having been "so long."

"But you were not," said Nina; "and please don't stand on ceremony with me, Mr. Errington; you have so many friends in front.

I do wish you would act just as if I wasn't here."

"It is a very kind wish," said he, smiling; "but I assure you it was a mere duty call I made just now, and I certainly couldn't act as if you were not here at all."

"But you know what I mean. It will make me unhappy if you let me be a *glaie* upon you."

"I assure you I am a great deal happier where I am. It is only between the acts that we can talk together."

Nina thought him kind and courteous not to desert her, but she did not believe that he would not rather go sometimes to speak to his friends.

But it was an intense pleasure to her to listen to his comments on the play and the acting—an intellectual treat of a rare order; and Nina was sublimely unconscious of the fact that Errington was "drawing her out" and making her show him a "taste of her quality," and a very high order of quality it was!

Well, all golden hours come to an end, and so did these. The curtain was down; artists and author had had their call, and the crowd began to pour out of the theatre. Of course, Errington was stopped every half minute, but he and Nina gained the street at last.

"Thank Heaven!" he said, with a sigh of relief. "It's a great nuisance, sometimes, to know so many people!"

"But very delightful, too!" said the girl laughing. Then earnestly, "Thank you so much, Mr. Errington! I have never enjoyed myself so much in my life!"

"I am very glad," he answered softly, his lips quivered a little, "I am sure I can say the same!"

Which answer did not seem, somehow, to apply to the play at all—not so much for the words, which might be comprehensive, but for the tone and manner; and again there swept through Nina's mind that vague feeling to which no name that is not too strong can be applied.

"Don't let me take you out of your way," he said, after a moment's pause. "I have only to get the omnibus at Trafalgar-square!"

"We must come and have some tea first," said Errington, "and then I'll see you safe into your omnibus. You're not in a hurry, are you?"

"Oh! no."

So they went to a confectioner's and had tea, and spent some time over it, for certainly Errington seemed in no haste to get rid of his companion; and she was happy enough with him.

Then he saw her up to the omnibus, and bade her good-bye; and when he turned away to walk back to Adelphi-terrace he felt as if he had turned from light into darkness.

CHAPTER V.

TRUE AND LOYAL.

BUT it seemed as if Nina were not to have a day of unbroken enjoyment. When she got home, near eight o'clock, she was astonished to see Godfrey waiting for her.

"Godfrey!" she exclaimed, in anything but pleased surprise.

"Where the deuce have you been all this time?" he said. "I have been waiting for you since five o'clock."

Her heart sank like lead.

"Why did you wait so long?" she answered, tossing off her hat and coat. "What do you want?"

"Oh! the old cry." He dropped into a chair.

"I gave you money yesterday. What have you done with it?"

"Oh!" it isn't that," said Godfrey, moving uneasily, "it's—it's a good deal more."

"What do you mean?" said the girl sternly "Speak out!"

"Fact is, Nina—I'm pretty heavily in debt—"

"Go on!"

"Well—it's—it's a matter of fifty pounds."

Nina did not start or cry out. For just one moment she paused, growing white to the very lips; then she said, in a hard, dry manner, "And you come to me to pay it? You might as well ask me for a few hundreds. I wonder you didn't!"

"Bosh! Nina." He was relieved at being spared reproaches or condemnation; he was of too base a metal to appreciate the fact that the absence of remonstrance demonstrates a state of things in which they are deemed useless. He had sunk so low; he was too callous to receive any impressions. "Bosh!" he repeated. "Naturally you can't pay the debt. I don't know how I managed it; part of it is for these toggeries, and the rest—various things."

"You must do what you can, Godfrey, or suffer whatever may happen. I have kept my promise to your dead mother to the uttermost. You have run me to the end of my tether. Now you can go."

"Look here, Nina, I'm desperate. You can help me if you will."

"Can I?"

"Fifty pounds would be nothing to Dudley Errington!" blurted out Godfrey, not daring to look at her.

Nina did not stir from where she stood, but the passionate blood dyed cheek and brow, suffused her very throat, and then faded slowly away, leaving her livid.

"You despicable hound!" she said, through her teeth. "Shameless coward! Silence!"—as he half started up—"don't dare to answer me! If I were man I would strike you full on the mouth for asking such a thing of me. I go to this man, upon whom I have no shadow of claim, who has been kind and generous to me, and borrow money of him to pay your disgraceful debts? It may be a lie that you owe more than half the money. You want it, perhaps, to squander on creatures debased enough, but better than you are. I have borne with you too long. You have made it impossible for me to bear more. Leave the room—and the house!"

She opened the door.

"You've an infernally venomous tongue when you choose to use it!" said Godfrey, sullenly. And he sneaked past her, with a sidelong, furtive glance in her face, and went out.

And then Nina paced the floor like one demented, a prey to the most terrible excitement. It seemed of no use to do anything—to struggle. Godfrey was always there to drag her down. If she could get away to Australia, and take another name—that would be the only thing to do. It would come to that in the end. Godfrey would commit some crime to get the money he wanted, and then she would have to leave Errington and hide herself somewhere—she didn't care where, or what became of her.

Of course, as the time passed on, and the girl grew calmer, from mere exhaustion, these wild ideas tamed down considerably. It was very likely, as she had said, that Godfrey was not in debt to the amount he named. She must try and find out a little more about it. Godfrey, despite the scathing words she had spoken to him, would not stand on his dignity for more than a day or two. He would come back when he wanted some money. Meanwhile, she must bear her fresh burden as best she could. She had her work to do, and, whatever her own trouble, that should not suffer.

She had not been more than half-an-hour in her study when Errington came in with some work he wanted to take precedence of all other; and, as he shook hands with her, his keen glance—it was keener now, in her case, than even it used to be—saw that something was wrong.

"Forgive me," he said, gently; "I hope nothing has happened to trouble you?"

"Oh! it is nothing," she said, a little hurriedly; "at least—nothing much."

He knew better than that. "Nothing much" does not give the eyes the strained look he saw in Nina's—there was always a shadow in her eyes—or that pained expression about the lips.

"I am very grieved," he said, in the same gentle manner, "that there should be any trouble. If it is anything in which I can be of assistance—will you treat me—quite as a friend?"

"You have been too good to me already, Mr. Errington."

The girl felt choking. She sat down quickly, and bent her head down over the papers he had brought, trying to hide her face from him while she strove to get back her self-control.

Perhaps he had need of self-control also. Perhaps that was why he did not speak again at once, though, partly, it was for her sake. When he felt that he could trust himself, he said, steadily—he was standing by her chair, and only moved to bend down a little,—

"There is no question of kindness. If I can help you in any way whatsoever, it will make me very happy to do so. I should value your trust in my friendship above everything. Will you let me prove that I mean what I say?"

"I know you mean it; I know it, indeed!" said the girl, chokingly, her head still bent. "I don't know how to thank you for your goodness—but no one can help me. I have always been used to trouble—only sometimes things seem to press more heavily."

Errington turned away abruptly and walked through the room. Those unconsciously pathetic words, "I have always been used to trouble," had nearly broken down his guard.

A very passion of longing made his heart throb, turned all the blood in his veins to fire. If he could, if he dared, but take this girl in his arms and entreat her to give him the right to shield and shelter her!

There was the fierce pain of jealousy, too. Was it that brainless *rowd* who had made her suffer? Could she have given him the jewel of her love to be played with and trampled upon?

But to-day—this hour—he must hold his peace. He had asked Nina to trust him as a friend; he could not, almost in the same breath, plead with her as a lover.

But it was some minutes before he could regain sufficient calmness to speak again. Such tempests are not subdued in strong natures, even by strong wills, in an instant; and Nina, a little wondering, a little bewildered, had grown calmer too; but she did not venture to raise her eyes to Errington's face.

Errington came back presently.

"I wish," he said, with an infinite tenderness in his soft voice, "it could have been my privilege to be of some assistance to you, but I shall hope it may be yet."

He held out his hand, and Nina gave him hers in silence. He held it a minute in a very close clasp, and then, without a word, dropped it and went out.

But it was fully half-an-hour before, strive as she would, Nina could give her mind to her work.

It was dawning upon her, in a confused sort of way—though still she could give the impression no definite shape—that Dudley Errington thought more of her than a man, however kind and generous, need think of his secretary.

She would not try to grapple with this feeling, but rather put it from her, and her anxiety about Godfrey helped her in this.

She did not see Errington the next day at all, nor did Godfrey put in an appearance; but the day following, when she went out for luncheon, she met him in the Strand.

Of course he wanted money, and she gave him some. Then she made him turn down a side street, and tried to get out of him some approximation to the truth regarding the money.

She gathered that it really was a debt, and this deepened her anxiety the more.

The tailor, Godfrey said, threatened proceedings, and one of the "others" was getting restive.

Nina repeated that she could "do nothing for him," and returned to Adelphi-terrace.

Errington came in once during the afternoon, but he only spoke of the work, though he looked at the girl keenly and covertly.

The first post the next morning brought her a letter from Errington.

"DEAR MISS LOVELL,—

"Can you, without inconvenience, be with me by 9.30 to-morrow. I find that I must be out by ten on important business, and I want to speak to you about some work before I leave.—Yours faithfully,

"DUDLEY STRANGE ERRINGTON."

Nina was in Adelphi-terrace a few minutes before the half-hour, and had just removed her walking things when Errington came in.

"Thank you so much for coming," he said, as he shook hands. "I do hope it was quite convenient?"

"Oh! yes, Mr. Errington; I always break-fast at eight o'clock."

"I am glad it has not put you out at all, for I am afraid you would have come all the same."

He proceeded to show her what he wanted done, and went out, and Nina went on with her work.

She was copying out actors' parts for a play of Errington's to be produced in two or three months' time, and she hardly heeded how the hours were flying until she heard Errington's step without, and looking at her watch found it was five o'clock.

"I must finish this speech first," she said, to herself, and went on writing. Then came a tap at the door, and Nina said, "Come in," rather guiltily.

"Miss Lovell," said Errington's soft voice; "I am afraid you are not to be trusted."

"I want to finish this speech, please," she said apologetically. "It won't take me long."

"Very well!"

Perhaps he ought to have left the room, but he didn't; he went and stood by the mantelpiece and looked down at the bended curly head, the graceful figure before him. He had had a long, worrying day; he was weary in mind, not in body, and to see Nina was to him "like the shadow of a rock in a weary land." He seemed to need her so much; it was so hard to keep away from her at all times; but generally he could make his heart obey his will. This evening he could not. Yet there was ever the miserable fear that she had no such need of him; and so he had held his peace, for if she could not give him the answer he prayed for she would, perhaps, find it impossible to stay here, and would thereby lose her bread.

It never occurred to him that his money and position could have any influence with Nina. He knew that love alone would be her arbiter.

The speech was finished, and Nina rose and began putting away the papers, Errington watching her in silence.

"You didn't trust me, then!" she said, half turning towards him when she had finished; "that I would not go on if I were left to my own devices!"

"Do you plead guilty?"

"I almost think I must. But you mustn't scold me, please. I wouldn't have stayed very late."

She held out her hand (her hat and coat

were in an adjoining room), for she was beginning to get a little nervous, she hardly knew why.

Errington took the little hand in his own, and his fingers closed over it with a tightening clasp.

"I couldn't scold you, you know," he said, softly, "whatever you did. So you want to run away from me?"

The colour had risen to the girl's cheek; her heart began to beat heavily.

"You told me I ought not to have been here when you came in," she said, trying to speak lightly, and making an involuntary effort to free her hand.

"That was for your sake, not my own. For my own," he said, "I was glad—oh! so glad—to see you!" and as he spoke, instead of releasing her, he made as to draw her nearer to him.

"Mr. Errington!"

The blood rushed to the girl's brow. She spoke under breath. She was trembling like a leaf; but Errington, with gentle force, had drawn her close to him, and pressed the hand he held with both his own against his heart.

"Nina!" he said, bending over her, his musical voice quivering with the passion that shook him, "will you not try to love me—to give me, if but a little return, for all my great love for you? I will wait patiently—so patiently—until you can surrender your whole heart to me!"

Poor Nina! Touched to the soul, bewildered, confused, knowing not how to answer this pleading, unable even to speak, suffered Errington to fold his arms about her, and hid her face against him, struggling for power to speak, and only bitter sobs would come, for the anguish of feeling that it was not love—not such love as she ought to give him—that made her yield to him. True, he seemed to understand; he pleaded only for "a little love," but it had always seemed to Nina a terrible thing to give little for much; and then there was the ever-present dread of that disgrace that might come to her name.

"Dearest!" Errington whispered—his lips just touched the curls on her brow—"one word, only one word; are you free—tell me that, Nina? Your heart is not already given?"

"Oh! no, no—not that!"

"Thank Heaven!" said Errington, brokenly. "Thank Heaven!"

"But," Nina went on, desperately, though still her voice faltered, "I—I do not love you—not as I ought—at least, I think—oh! you are so good, so noble. I am so unworthy of you," she said, passionately; "I dare not wrong you!"

"My darling, where is the wrong? I love you with all my heart, Nina; but I know that you do not so love me—yet. I can wait for that if you will give yourself to me."

"No, no!" said the girl, in a kind of terror, "don't ask for that! I must have time—time to think! My brain is all confused. Will you give me time?"

He strained her to him a minute in silence; then he said very low,—

"I am in your hands, Nina. I would not win from you a promise you might repent of. If I may not ask you now to be my wife, tell me when I may come again to you for your answer. Only," he bowed his head on hers, and drew in his breath in unutterable pain, there was such passionate pleading in his voice as almost querulous her then—"remember how much I love you, and have pity."

Then he gently released her and turned aside. There was a minute or two of dead silence. Nina stood with her hand tightly pressed to her heart. If she could only answer him now—if she could only answer him now! But then rose up the sinister shadow that had always darkened her life. No! She must have time to think

Brain and heart were on fire; and this at least she knew, that she loved this man too much to have any independent judgment under the spell of his presence.

At length, with an effort she spoke.

"Will you give me—a fortnight—to answer you?"

Errington turned towards her.

"You are generous to me, Nina," he said gently; "and, remember, whatever your answer may be"—he took her hand in his now—"I am your true and faithful friend always. You will stay with me, Nina? You will not leave me? And let me say this once more. Think of me during this time as one who, without thought of the future, without hope of reward, will count it his greatest happiness to serve you. If there is any need, any trouble, in which I can help you, will you come to me, Nina? Will you so trust me as to believe that, though I love you, I will be to you in your need only a friend—a true and loyal friend?"

Nina bowed her face down on the hands that held her.

"You break my heart!" she sobbed, "you break my heart!"

"Dearest! I must not try to force your confidence. I can only ask you to come to me in your trouble—to trust me!"

"I do trust you—to the uttermost!"

"My darling—thanks! Then you promise me?"

She whispered "Yes!"

He lifted her face, and gazed into it for a moment wistfully. Her eyes sank before his. Then he put his arms about her again, and drew her gently to him.

"Nina"—the words seemed hardly breathed—"will you let me kiss you?"

The soft colour rose to her cheek, and for a second her eyes met his, then dropped again. He bent his head lower, to meet yielding lips; and as his lips pressed hers in that long, close kiss, it seemed to her as if all her being went out to him, drawn through the might of his love. She was no more her own; but his—heart, and soul, and body.

And then—he had put her from him, and she was alone—with that kiss that chained and held her on her lips—on her heart—and almost she had cried aloud, "Come back to me! Come back!" but paused, pressing her hand over her eyes. "No—no! I am mad now—his love compels mine. It is better that I should have time. And there is that other—that other!"

If she had but yielded then!

CHAPTER VI.

A NAME ON A BILL.

It was inevitable that Nina should dread her first meeting with Errington after that interview, not because she thought for an instant he would show himself by so much as a look the lover; but the relations between them made it impossible that she should feel really at ease with him; and there was a consciousness, too, of having, in effect, deceived him. She had promised to go to him if he could in any way help her; and he could help her, yet she would not, could not fulfil her promise. And when he came for his answer she must tell him the truth about Godfrey. Would that stand between them?

Nina knew that Dudley Errington would ask only one question, and that answered as he desired, nothing else would influence him in the slightest degree. Ought she, then, to befriend him against his own judgment? Impossible.

She had pledged herself to give him his answer, and he must be free to make his own choice.

And that answer what must it be? As the days passed on, how clear it became to her that it must be what he sought! How could she help loving him? How she longed, even while she dreaded, to see him; and when one day—it was

four days after that evening—he came in, she felt her heart beat almost to suffocation! He just shook hands with her as he had always been used to do, spoke to her about some work, and went out, not lingering a moment, not uttering one unnecessary word. And Nina had not dared once to look him in the face.

She had not been at home half-an-hour that evening when Godfrey came in. He was a good deal excited, and Nina could see at once that he had been drinking a good deal of wine, although he was not intoxicated.

"Well," she said coldly, "do you want money?"

"Not at present!" he said, sitting down with a rather insolent air. "I've got some," and as he patted his pocket Nina heard the chink of gold.

"Where did you get it?" she asked calmly, though she felt as if her blood were turning to ice.

"Old Barnett, the money-lender; you don't know him, of course!"

"Barnett did not let you have money without security!"

"He had a bill, my dear!"

"A bill! Your name is worthless. Who endorsed it? You know no one of any substance!"

"I was deucedly hard up, as I told you," said Godfrey, ignoring the question for the present, "and as you wouldn't help me, I helped myself. May as well be hanged for a sheep as a lamb! I made the bill for two hundred pounds, and Barnett took it, for the good name on the back."

"Godfrey—will you drive me mad?" Her voice seemed hardly her own—her lips were dry and parched. "Whose name?"

"Dudley Errington."

She staggered back with a cry that startled, but it did not touch her.

"A forgery!" she said, in a hoarse whisper, her eyes burning, her face livid. "A forgery!"

"Yes," said Godfrey, doggedly, "A forgery! You wouldn't borrow fifty pounds to save me from a prison; now he'll have to shell out to the tune of two hundred pounds. He'll do it for your sake, I'll bet! I was always skilful in that sort of thing, and I got hold of a letter Errington wrote to you one day, and got off his signature with a little practice. Now you see what you've driven me to!"

Nina stood staring at the hopelessly degraded wretch before her—

"As if ice were in her curdled blood."

Forgery! and of his name, of all men on the wide earth. It had come at last—the blow so long, so vaguely dreaded, and it crushed her to the earth. "Go to Dudley Errington—say to him in one breath, 'I love you!' and 'My kinsman, bearing my father's name, is a felon. Buy him free of a felon's cell as the price of my love!' No, the blow had fallen, and it must crush her. She, who was innocent, must share the penalty of this man's monstrous guilt. No shame should come to Dudley Errington. Even were Godfrey saved from this crime, would it be his last? No—let him fall; let him suffer. She went close up to her cousin.

"When does this bill become due?" she said.

"Within the month."

"Then, while you have money, make good your escape. I will not go to Mr. Errington. I would not lift my finger to save you from the gallows!"

"You're mad!" cried Godfrey, springing to his feet.

"If I am you have made me so. When that bill is presented Mr. Errington will deny the endorsement, and you know what will follow."

"He would come straight to you," said her cousin. "You could not deny the truth."

"I shall not be there; I shall go there no more. You have ruined my life; rest content with that. Now, leave me; but before you go take my warning—the last words I will ever speak to you. Look to your own safety in flight. Look no more for help from me. I am to you, from this moment, as if I were dead!"

Once again she opened the door for him—this was for the last time. He looked at her; but in the fierce, hard glitter of the dark eyes, in the rigid lines of the firm mouth, he saw no relenting. If he were saved it would be by no help of hers.

He had tried to force her hand, and had failed. With a reckless laugh and an oath, he went out, and the door closed behind him.

Nina remembered shutting and locking the door, and then there was a blank, but not for long. She struggled back to consciousness; and then she sat down to think.

In all her agony her brain was horribly, luminously clear. She did not sob or weep. She was like a creature whose heart is stunned, but whose brain retains its faculties, whose limbs their activity.

Every little thing was thought of. She could not go back to Adelphi-terrace. She would not meet Dudley Errington again—for his own sake.

There was felony between them. Then she must leave London to-night. She counted out what money she had—eight pounds. She put it in her purse. She went about swiftly and methodically, packing certain necessities in a large bag; and what she could not take with her she locked away in boxes.

Then she made up the rent, and enclosed it in a note to the landlady, saying that she was obliged to leave London in haste, and asking that the boxes might be taken care of, for a month or two, at any rate.

All this time he had no definite intention as to her destination, but when her preparations were finished she sat down to think of that point.

The main thing was to go where Errington would be least likely to find her. He would certainly make an effort to do so; but she must also think of going where there might be a possibility of obtaining employment of some kind, and she must not spend more of her money than she could help in travelling.

She decided at length on Manchester, and, having looked out her train, she took paper and pen to write to Errington. This was the most difficult task of all. Yet even now she did not weep.

Her tears seemed scorched up. Had Nina forgotten her promise? Forgotten it! Was it not burning into her very soul? She had only to go to her lover now—this very hour—if she chose, and all would be well! No lover he, but "true and loyal friend."

She knew that! She knew that he would not ask—would not dream of—other reward than the reward of having saved her.

But the mere thought of going to him in this awful crisis made her shrink and cower down as if the shame of the crime were her own; for face to face with that thought she knew the truth—that she loved the man who had promised "loyal friendship."

Then, loving him, she could not go to him. Had there been still uncertainty it might be possible, though even then this crime of Godfrey's—pointing to a future of even deeper shame—would seem to bar the way; but go to-night to the man whose prayer only a few days ago she could not answer, and in the breath that confessed her love, ask of him such help as this—to buy her kinsman out of the felon's dock! It would seem, as it were, a bargain. It would be taking him at a disadvantage, wringing from him his promise by a

cheat, making it impossible, for chivalry's sake, that he should answer her. "I offered you loyal friendship—and friendship it must be henceforth. I did not dream of dishonour."

No; there was only flight. She had but to speak one word to be gathered into Dudley Errington's arms, and sheltered there from all pain and trouble, but the word must not be spoken; she must turn from the sunlight, and go out into "the sunless sea!" Some men are born to trouble as the sparks fly upwards. Was she one of those creatures—accursed from birth—to whom happiness was denied?

The paper lay before her, and she had not written a line yet. The striking of a neighbouring clock startled her. She snatched up the pen, and wrote, with shaking hand,—

"DEAR MR. ERRINGTON,—

"Try to forgive me. I cannot come back to you any more. I dare not meet you again. Something has happened which compels me to go away. Don't seek me. It is better as it is.—Yours faithfully,

NINA LOVELL."

It was a strange letter. She would have written it differently had she been able to measure words, or even to think more clearly, for now a sort of numbness was coming over her brain. With a strong effort she rallied, and, taking the letter in her hand, she left the room noiselessly. All was quiet in the house. She stole down the stairs, and out at the front door into the street. There she paused, and looked round her. It was dark. There was no one in sight. She turned, and walked quickly away, taking the direction of St. Pancras.

CHAPTER VII.

THE TRUTH.

"A LETTER from Nina!" said Dudley Errington, to himself, with a start, as he saw her handwriting among the morning letters; and a thrill of apprehension shot through him. But he pressed the envelope to his lips before he opened it. And then those strange, incoherent lines were before him.

Once—twice—he read them before he could fully grasp the truth that she had written them, and that she was gone; and then he sprang to his feet, clutching his hand over his heart.

"Nina!" he muttered, hoarsely; "oh! Heaven—my darling!—what can have happened to drive you from me? You promised to come to me—your own lips told me that you trusted me to the uttermost—and you prove it—so! But it is no sin of yours! Stay!"

He stood there with set teeth and burning eyes, recalling Nina's—to him—evident trouble only the other morning, and her reiterated assurance that he could not help her.

The man with whom he had seen her at the theatre—the sinister-looking ne'er-do-well—who and what was he? By Heaven! he was accountable for this. But, first of all, Nina must be found.

Errington hesitated not a minute. He went straight out, hailed a hansom, and was driven up to Nina's address in Camden Town.

There, explaining only that he was the gentleman for whom Miss Lovell worked, but not giving his name, he "interviewed" the landlady; and by skilful cross-questioning, elicited all that person knew. And his suspicions were fully confirmed.

Miss Lovell had gone away last night, leaving a note—given into Errington's hands. No one had seen her go, or could form any idea where or why she went.

Miss Lovell was the nicest lodger anyone could wish for! She never saw anyone except her cousin, Mr. Godfrey Lovell. Mr. Lovell—he wasn't much good!—didn't seem to do anything. He was always in and out! The landlady had a shrewd idea that Miss Lovell pretty well kept him.

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TWICE CHOSEN.

CHAPTER XII.

SIR RICHARD PUZZLES THE LAWYER.

WHEN Sir Richard and Adela went down to luncheon there was no need for them to inquire whether Lilian had spent a pleasant morning, for her face was radiantly bright.

She and Horace had, however, really been too long engaged, although without parental sanction, to obtrude their feelings upon others, when the first astonishment and joy was over; and only a few fond and trustful glances told they were lovers.

Both were in the best of spirits, and their cheerfulness was contagious, and soon the conversation became sparkling and animated, and the Baronet ceased to wonder at his daughter's choice, as he listened to Horace's amusing sallies, and looked at his handsome face.

A pang of regret shot through his mind at his want of position in the county, but he thrust it back impatiently, and determined to try and overcome his aristocratic prejudices.

"What are you young people going to do this afternoon?" he asked at length. "Suppose you all three drive over to the Rectory, and tell our good friends there your little bit of news—eh! Lilian?"

"I should like it so much, papa. I know both Mr. and Mrs. Thorndyke will be really glad, although they would not encourage me in disobedience," she returned, with a smile.

"As Adela did," laughed the Baronet.

"Oh! you must not say that, papa; no one knows how good Dela has been to me."

"Oh yes! he may," cried Scamp brightly. "He may say whatever he likes. It is he who is good, really good; for he has overcome himself. There is no merit in standing by a friend."

"Who helped me?" inquired Sir Richard, looking at Adela.

"Your own kind heart," she said softly.

He was about to deny it, when she struck in with her sweet imperious way,

"I won't be contradicted, Sir Richard, so you had better give in at once."

"Very well," he answered merrily; but I shall punish you by staying abroad a month longer than I meant to do."

"Abroad! Surely you are not going away, papa?" asked Lilian, looking up.

"Yes my dear, the doctor has ordered me to leave England at once."

"Oh! papa! I am so sorry."

"Sorry! Why?"

"I shall miss you greatly," she answered with feeling.

"Not a bit of it; you are coming too. You would not have me go alone, would you?"

"Oh! no, papa!" she said hesitatingly, with her eyes downcast and her colour deepening. "Of course you cannot go alone; it was thoughtless of me to imagine it for a moment. Indeed I shall be very glad to go and take care of you."

"I can't say you looked very overjoyed, my dear!" he answered grimly.

"Naturally I wish we could all have remained here, especially now that we are going to be so happy."

"Speak for yourself, my dear, speak for yourself. I see before me a very barren life! That young rascal promised me the next two years of your society without his interference, and he has been poaching all the morning. Well, Lilian, tell the truth—you don't like to leave your lover?"

"No, papa, I don't."

"Well, I will go without you."

"Not for the world. Horace can do without me better than you can now, father, for you are not well."

A smile of satisfaction lighted up his face, which was reflected upon Adela's who gave him a glance, as much as to say, "I told you so."

"And what did you say to the arrangement, young gentleman?" demanded the Baronet, turning suddenly upon Horace.

"Lilian has given the right decision, sir," he replied; "she must certainly accompany you."

The smile deepened.

"You two will want to write love-letters to each other, I suppose," he remarked, with a wicked twinkle in his eyes. "I conclude I must consent to it once a month or so!"

"A little oftener than that I hope, sir," pleaded Horace.

"Never satisfied!" he laughed. "Well, I must see! I'll think about it, Lake."

Then he turned to Lilian.

"We must coax the Rector to let Adela accompany us, my dear; we could not do without her yet, could we?"

"Oh! Dela, I am more than glad. If only Horace were going too, how I should enjoy it!"

And a silence followed her remark.

Two of them knew that he was to go, but the Baronet liked to let out his favours in surprises, and Adela had no mind to thwart his whim.

Lilian's wish was expressed upon the impulse of the moment, with no thought of the possibility of such a scheme.

Horace gave her a grateful glance, but shook his head.

"How would my work get on, little one? No, there must be no pleasure-making for me for the next two years," he answered, in a very low voice; "then I will take my dear girl abroad myself, and how I shall enjoy it!"

Their eyes met, and their hands met firmly, too, under the table.

"I have communicated with the Rector on the subject, and all you have to do this afternoon is to bring me his consent to Adela's accompanying us," said the Baronet.

"We will not both leave you," said Adela, hastily; "let Lilian and Horace go over together, dear Sir Richard."

"Without a *chaperon*! Impossible! No, my dear girl, you must do gooseberry, and I'll take a nap. By-the-by, bring the Rector and his good wife back to dinner."

"That would be nice!" replied Adela, warmly.

"And tell them the carriage shall take them home in the evening."

"How thoughtful you are!"

"Am I? Then I must have learnt the trick of you, missy," he laughed.

"Now, girls, go and dress. Suppose you help me upstairs, Master Horace. I think your hair will want smoothing before you appear in respectable society. Have you looked at yourself in the glass lately?"

"Not since I made it all stand on end, as far as I could," laughed Lilian; "but it is so curly, and I cannot succeed very well!"

"What things you girls are!" grumbled Sir Richard. "What a way to show your affection for a man, to try and make his hair stand on end! One would think you wanted him for a bottle brush! Go on, the pair of you, or Adela will be trying her pranks on me to keep you in countenance."

And as he spoke he took Horace by the arm, and led him from the room.

"Well!" he said, when they were alone, "Lilian's birthday only comes once a year. I suppose you want to stay to dinner. I'll send over for your clothes."

"That is indeed kind of you, sir. With your permission I will write a note to my mother, and tell her what to pack up for me. They do not even know where I am to-day."

"Bad son! bad son!" returned the old man, with pretended depreciation.

"I left a message to say I could not tell when I should be back," continued Horace.

"Oh! of course, of course! Trying to take off the unfavourable impression, eh?"

Horace laughed.

"Well, sir, I cannot pretend to desire your unfavourable opinion," he admitted.

"Well, then, make my child happy," said Sir Richard gravely, "and you will deserve my good one."

"It shall not be my fault, sir, if sorrow reaches my dear girl. I will shield her from it, Heaven helping me," he replied earnestly.

In silence Sir Richard clasped the young man's hand.

"May He bless you in your endeavour," he answered brokenly, after a pause. "May Lilian be as dear to you as her mother was to me."

Then he turned from him abruptly, and Horace went out with quiet steps, and left him alone.

When Adela and Lilian came in to say "Good-bye" they found him very still.

"Send Harvey to me, Lilian," he said, and his valet entered the room as they went downstairs.

"I am going to write a note," he asserted. "Order the dog-cart round, and when it is prepared you are to come back to me for instructions. Just ask Mr. Lake if his letter is ready before he starts."

The man found it already in the hands of the butler, and informed his master of the fact, also that the trap was at the door, a quarter of an hour later.

"Very well, take this note and Mr. Lake's; leave the latter at Mr. Lake's house, and say you will return for Mr. Horace's bag. Then drive on to the office, and bring Mr. Lake back with you, after giving him my letter. Remember you are not to return without him, and you are to call for the bag on your way. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly, Sir Richard."

"Tell the groom to drive quickly. I want to see Mr. Lake as soon as possible."

"I beg your pardon, sir, I hope you are not feeling worse," began the man anxiously.

"Don't trouble yourself, Harvey; my will was made long ago, if I make another it won't be in a hurry."

"No offence, sir, I hope. I humbly beg your pardon."

"Don't waste time, man, go at once."

The valet withdrew with a respectful bow, and in less than five minutes Sir Richard was asleep.

Great indeed was the astonishment at Mr. Lake's residence, when the Baronet's dog-cart dashed up to the door, and Horace's note was placed in his mother's hand.

"DEAR MUMSY," it ran. "Send me over all my dinner toggery in my small portmanteau by the bearer, please. I have so much to tell you but it must keep till we meet. One thing, however, I must say, and that is there never was a happier fellow than your loving son,

HORACE."

Mrs. Lake sat looking at the lines in bewilderment.

What did it all mean?

There never was a happier fellow than her son Horace!

Her motherly heart gave a great bound of gladness, for there had been moments when her boy's bright and handsome face had been sad indeed.

"The young man said he would be back for the bag in a few minutes," ventured the abigail.

Mrs. Lake started.

"Of course, Fanny, I will select the things at once," and she did so, her mind still upon her son's words.

Mr. Lake was perfectly aware that he and Sir

Richard Freemantle were *two*, both as friends and acquaintances, as well as in a business point of view.

He had managed a good many matters for him in days gone by, before Horace had presumed to love his daughter, but that time was over, and no communication had passed between the Hall and the solicitor's house or office since.

He was therefore bewildered to hear that Sir Richard Freemantle's dog-cart was waiting to convey him to Marsden Hall, with the request that he would kindly start as soon as possible.

Moreover a note was placed in his hand, written by the Baronet himself.

"Sir Richard Freemantle presents his compliments to Mr. Lake, and will be obliged by his coming to see him at once, upon pressing business."

The lawyer called for his hat and overcoat. The Baronet was not a client to be kept waiting.

It was evident he was to receive some instructions, possibly to be taken into favour again, and the law management of the Marsden Hall estates was worth having.

So Mr. Lake went willingly and with all speed.

He had not forgotten Sir Richard's bitter words to him, but he could afford to put them aside, if it were to his advantage to do so.

He looked surprised when the dog-cart stopped at his house, and the valet sprang down from the back seat to ring the bell. His own maid quickly answered it, with his son's small portmanteau in her hand.

"Misses says can you come in and speak to her, sir?" she asked.

"Not now, Fanny, but I shall soon be home, tell Mrs. Lake. Where is that going?"

"Please sir, I don't know; this gentleman said he would call for it," and she pointed to Harvey the valet.

"I am following Sir Richard's instructions," replied the man, and slipping the portmanteau under the seat, he again jumped up.

The high-mettled horse dashed forward at a brisk trot, and in a very few minutes they had left the town, and had traversed the intervening two miles which divided them from Marsden Hall.

Sir Richard was still asleep when Harvey opened the door, entering the room with the solicitor behind him.

"Hallo! wouldn't come, you say!" he cried, starting up.

"Mr. Lake is here, sir," returned the man, and that personage stepped forward, while the valet retired.

"You don't often catch me napping, Mr. Lake," said the Baronet, with a grim smile. "I have been an invalid lately, so I must be excused."

"Certainly," began the other politely, "a siesta in the afternoon is often very refreshing. I am sorry you have been in ill-health. We have not met for some time."

"No, not since your young rascal of a son chose to make love to my daughter, and what's more, sir, he's at it still, at this very moment!"

Mr. Lake's hopes went down.

Instead of being reinstated as the Baronet's man of business, had he been sent for to hear again of Horace's enormities? It seemed very like it.

"It is a matter of regret to me, Sir Richard, that my son should do anything to annoy you. My only excuse for him is, that I am sure he and the young lady are sincerely attached to each other; but believe me I do nothing to encourage it; on the contrary, I discourage it!"

"Then why not send the rogue abroad for a time?" he asked, sharply.

"Impossible! I could not afford it, sir."

"Tut-tut—that shall not stand in his way. Look here, Lake, I have a little business to be done at Mentone; let the lad go there for the winter months."

"But, sir, I should have to engage another clerk in his place."

"Yes, *pro tem.*, and you can charge his salary in my bill, also that of Master Horace; the two combined won't ruin me."

"I don't like to decide without speaking to my son; he may not wish to go."

"Give him the chance," chuckled the Baronet; "if he says no, let there be an end of the matter."

"You cannot speak more handsomely than that, Sir Richard," returned Mr. Lake, warmly. "Horace ought to consider himself a lucky fellow to have the opportunity of getting such a trip. You specified Mentone, I think, as his place of residence!"

"I did, but I have no objection to his having a look at Paris on his way there—not a bit—I should like to do so myself were I in his place."

"You are very kind, sir: and may I ask whether you hope that absence will shake the faith of our children towards each other, for if you propose the arrangement with any such expectations I think it is only fair to tell you that I do not believe my son Horace will ever change in his affection for Miss Lilian. For the rest, though I shall miss him very much, I should like him to accept your offer. He has fretted a great deal, and the change would do him good; only it would not be honourable in me to hold out any hope that he will give up his suit upon his return."

"We will see, we will see," replied the Baronet, with a merry twinkle in his eye, which the man at law failed to understand.

"You will throw no difficulties, then, in the way of the boy's going?"

"None whatever."

"And when can he start?"

"As soon as he will."

"Tut-tut—young people must let their elders settle things for them sometimes; we will say this day week."

"If Horace agrees to the arrangement, most certainly, but I fear he may not like to leave the neighbourhood which holds the girl he loves."

"Romance! nothing but romance!"

"Very likely, Sir Richard, but most of us have gone through the phase ourselves, so we must look leniently on these ideas of the young ones."

"Yes! yes! we have all passed through it if we have hearts at all," murmured the old man. "And now Mr. Lake as we have been friendly over this matter, let us try and work together."

"No one could desire it more than I do, Sir Richard. I am truly sorry any folly of my boy's should have caused you annoyance, but I was powerless to influence him."

"Well, well, all the better; a young man who can't think and act for himself is not worth much. Suppose you bring Mrs. Lake to dinner here to-night, to meet the Rector and his wife? This is my daughter's birthday, and we may as well have a little merry making."

Mr. Lake looked at the Baronet in surprise.

"It would be quite like old times," he said hastily, "and Mrs. Lake will be highly honoured."

"Then that is settled."

"Thank you, and if I can get hold of Horace I will sound him about this scheme of yours, Sir Richard, and let you know what he says."

"All right, we dine at seven. Come at half-past six, and you can have a talk with the lad before dinner."

Mr. Lake began to think his sometime client was getting a little childish, and the old man was sharp enough to catch his thought in his eye.

"Oh! I forgot to tell you Master Horace will be one of the party," he laughed. "I have asked him to dinner to-night. Even condemned criminals are allowed to say good-bye to their friends, Mr. Lake, and I could not be hard on the boy. As you reminded me just now, we were young once, and lovers into the bargain."

The lawyer began to feel more than ever puzzled; his mind was so chaotic he was quite unable to form an opinion upon Sir Richard's seemingly inconsistent conduct. That he should be willing to pay some hundreds of pounds to get rid of a detrimental admirer of his daughter's, and yet so tender of his feelings as to invite him to dinner, to give him the opportunity of saying farewell to the prohibited young lady, were things totally past his comprehension; and very serious fears set in, in his fancy, as to the state of the Baronet's intellect.

"Is there anything I can do for you legally, Sir Richard, before I go?" he asked gravely, "or did you send for me merely to make this proposition, or to give us your kind invitation in person?"

"There is nothing more just now, Lake. We will see how you manage matters with your son," he added cheerily. "If you are successful in your persuasions there will be a great deal for you to look after this winter, for I may be away myself."

Mr. Lake looked at him in pity.

Here was Sir Richard, wanting to banish Horace, that he might not meet his daughter, and after all he was going away himself. Then a sudden light broke upon the subject. If Lilian was to be left at home alone, there was perhaps some sense in the Baronet's precaution.

"Is not your daughter to accompany you, sir?" he inquired, after a pause.

"That is just as she pleases, Lake; it is the best way to let young people choose for themselves, after all."

"And you do not think she will go?"

"I never said so."

"You had better not let my son have a hint of this, Sir Richard."

"Why?"

"Because he is but human. If Miss Lilian remains here, with no one to protect her from his attentions, is he likely to cease them when she receives them willingly?"

The Baronet chuckled.

"Lawyers are accustomed to have hard nuts to crack, I suppose, Lake. You must do the best you can with the rascal; and now had you not better go, or Mrs. Lake may make other arrangements?"

"Just so," he replied, well aware that there would be quite a little domestic commotion on his wife's part at the unexpected invitation, and no end of excitement in the choosing of caps and frills, gloves and laces, for the occasion, and he rose at once.

Sir Richard extended his hand.

"Don't forget, be here at half-past six—dinner will be at seven, then while you are talking to that young rascal of yours, the ladies can tell each other their secrets; it's wonderful how many they find to relate when they get together. For me, if I have one, I keep it to myself. Once to d, you never know where it my travel. I don't believe in confidants!"

"It would not do for my clients all to hold your opinions, Sir Richard. Solicitors, like doctors, ought to know the whole of a case if their services are to be of any avail; and in both of our professions we are bound in honour not to reveal what is confided to us."

"In honour, yes! but the article is scarce. A secret is no longer a secret if even your lawyer know it."

"You have not a very high opinion of ——" "Of anyone," struck in the Baronet; "all men are ready to look out for their own interests."

"And who would, if they did not?"

"Exactly so. It is every man for himself

in this battle of life, and his neighbour, if needs be, for a stepping stone!"

"Tis true, 'tis pity; pity 'tis, 'tis true!"

And now, Mr. Lake, take my dog-cart and make use of it; keep it to return in if Madame be not afraid to mount so high."

"She will not object at all. I am sure."

"And the close carriage can leave you as it takes the Rector and his wife home at night. It holds four."

"Thank you, thank you very much."

Sir Richard had once more tucked his legs up on the sofa, and now he laid his head back on the pillow and closed his eyes.

"Good-bye," said Mr. Lake.

"Eh? why, you're coming back, are you not?" asked the Baronet, irritably.

"Thank you, yes; then 'an revoir!'"

"Oh certainly, *au revoir* by all means, my good fellow," returned the other, closing his eyes with utter indifference. "You know the way? or touch the bell?"

"Thanks, I know my way very well; it is not the first time I have visited you in your room by many."

"Of course not, before that rascal——" began the Baronet, but Mr. Lake wouldn't stop for another outbreak against his son, and was quietly closing the door.

"Long-winded fellows those lawyers," grumbled Sir Richard, as he turned on his side. "I've puzzled him anyway, given him an enigma to work at, which will take him the rest of the afternoon, and then he will not find the answer without help. I've a great mind to tell that young dog the joke, and make him vow that nothing shall take him from the vicinity of Marsden Hall. Then I could storm at his father for an hour." And the old man chuckled till he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MYSTERY SOLVED.

"NEVER knew anyone so verbose," thought Mr. Lake, as he went slowly down the stairs, "and his mental tiles are getting very shaky. How changed from twenty-five years ago, when he brought home his sweet young wife, who worshipped him, although he was twice her age! He was forty then, and how old he looks now; but he cannot be more than sixty-five, aged as he looks. He is wearing badly. I am only his junior by ten years, and I'm a boy compared to him. Poor Sir Richard! What does it all mean?"

"Is the trap to take you home, sir?" asked the butler.

"Yes! and to wait and bring me and Mrs. Lake back again," returned the solicitor with importance. "I'm sorry to give so much trouble."

"Not at all, sir," replied the man politely; and passing out at the door he went to the groom who was in charge of the vehicle, and spoke to him in a low voice.

"I'd better take the horse to the hotel if I have to wait," answered the groom. "All right."

Then Mr. Lake jumped up, and was whirled along homeward, with a very preoccupied mind.

"Sir Richard does not seem himself at all," he said to the groom suddenly.

"No, sir, he's very much pulled down. The brownkitt is a very weakening thing," replied the man gravely.

"Yes! illness weakens mind and body," suggested the lawyer.

"It do, sir, but Sir Richard's mind is as clear as crystal. He is going away, you know, sir, and he had me in yesterday to give me his orders respecting the horses during his absence. Nothink was forgotten, ill as he has been; and I was shocked to see him look so thin and white."

"Ah!" replied Mr. Lake, and relapsed into silence, feeling more puzzled than before.

Mrs. Lake was watching at the window for her husband's arrival, not at all displeased that the outside world should see the good man seated in state in the baronet's handsome trap.

Rumours had crept about of the quarrel between the owner of Marsden Hall and his solicitor.

People had assigned many reasons for it, but the real reason was only known to a few, if guessed by many, for neither the Freemantles nor the Lakes had desired to make the affair the talk of the small town.

The split had been commented upon, was a little nine days' wonder, and now appeared to be forgotten.

Mrs. Lake ran to the door to admit her husband.

"Are you going back, sir?" inquired the groom.

"Thank you, we are to be at the Hall at six-thirty. We had better start at a quarter past, I suppose?"

The man touched his hat, and laid his whip gently over the horse's back, and drove to the nearest hotel.

"What's up, I wonder?" he said to himself as he turned into the stable-yard.

Mrs. Lake's query was of the same nature, if not couched in exactly the same language.

"Well, Henry," she asked with an intent look. "Have you good news?"

He walked into the sitting-room and closed the door.

"I'm blessed if I know," he admitted. "Sir Richard seems to me to be decidedly cracked, but that groom of his asserts that he is perfectly clear-headed."

"You didn't ask such a question, surely?"

"Is it likely? One can find out a thing without asking; most people can be pumpeyed!"

"Why were you sent for?"

"To invite you and me to dinner, my dear!" he answered, with a smile.

"Us to dinner!" exclaimed the lady, with evident pleasure. "Well, I am glad. There is nothing cracked about that, Henry; he wishes to be friends again."

"Just so, but why? It cannot advant ge him in any way, and he has invited Hor ce too!"

"Invited Horace! Then that is what his note to me meant. Henry, depend upon it, you will see our boy the Baronet's son-in-law yet!" she cried, excitedly.

"Nonsense, my dear! You women are always off at a tangent about something. Sir Richard is so anxious to get rid of the lad that he has decided to send him for the winter to Mentone on some pretended business. The scheme will cost him a cool five hundred!"

"Well, he can afford it!"

"I daresay; but where is your dream picture—eh, wife?"

Mrs. Lake looked crestfallen.

"I don't understand. What is his object in wanting to send Horace away?"

"Goodness knows, unless he thinks Lord Carruthers is after his daughter. I hear he has been a good deal at the Hall lately."

"Does Horace know it?" asked Mrs. Lake, sharply.

"How can I tell you what the lad knows or does not? He is not a boy to talk. My dear, you had better go and look out your finery; for one thing is certain at any rate—we are to be at the Hall at half-past six."

"I would have had a new dress if I had only known," said the good woman, with an air of regret. "We so seldom go out in this little place, and when we do our things are good enough for our company. But I should have wished to look well to-night for Horace's sake. I should not like him to be ashamed of us; and, my dear, your dress coat is so rusty, you really must order another."

"In case Sir Richard should honour us again, eh!" laughed Mr. Lake. "Well, my dear, we had better wait, and see whether I get the estate work to do as of yore; if not, I should not feel justified in obliging you till the boys are out in life. As to Horace, he would never be ashamed of his father and mother if they appeared in rags and tatters!"

"Bless the boy!" replied his wife, with tears in her eyes, "you are right, Henry; he never would," and she ran off upstairs to dress, contentedly arraying herself in her well-worn evening dress.

Punctually at half-past six the dog-cart drew up before the hall door at Marsden, and the butler showed Mr. and Mrs. Lake into the drawing-room, where they found a merry party already assembled.

"Lake, I am very glad it is all right," said the Rector of Winsthorpe, in a low voice, giving him a friendly clasp of the hand.

"Thank you, thank you!" returned the other, not at all certain upon what he was being congratulated, and passed on to greet the rest of the guests.

"Lilian, my dear, Mrs. Lake will like to take off her bonnet if you will conduct her upstairs; and you, young gentleman, can show your father into my room," ended Sir Richard, turning to Horace.

Then, as they left the apartment in pairs, he looked at Adela.

He had turned it over and over again in his mind as to what the girl's trouble could be; and having come to the conclusion that it could not possibly be anything but a love affair, set his wits to work to unravel the mystery of whom it could be that she cared for in secret; and he could find no one worthy of such an attachment in the neighbourhood but Lord Carruthers.

Under this impression he had been unusually friendly towards the young nobleman, and had given him a warm welcome whenever he had put in an appearance at the Hall.

"Adela, I have another guest coming this evening," he said, suddenly.

"Indeed! what a pity! we were just eight. How naughty of you, Sir Richard!"

"Well, my dear, I don't often entertain, and I shall not have the chance of doing it again for some time, so you must forgive me this once. I have long wanted to ask Lord Carruthers to dinner."

Adela coloured, but made no reply, and the old man thought he had found out her secret.

Mr. Thorndyke, who had heard the conversation, struck in warmly,—

"I, at any rate, am glad he is coming. Carruthers is a great favourite of mine, and is always a welcome guest at my house."

"Well, I am pleased that some one is satisfied," he laughed; "and now what about Miss Pussy here? Her cough is still troublesome, and Mentone will set her up, to say nothing of my selfish desire to have her with us. You won't say no, will you, Rector?"

"She has been a long while away from home," returned her father, "and her mother and I miss her sadly, but we do not think it would be right in us to consider our own feelings before her good. Do you want to go, Adela?"

She lifted her eyes to his, full of deep affection, and her hand crept into his.

"My feelings are too mixed to analyse," she replied; "you shall decide for me, father!"

There was a pause, and Mr. Thorndyke sat looking upon the ground, wrapped in deep thought.

"You shall go, darling!" he said at length, "and may the journey be for your good, as well as that of your friends."

Sir Richard flung up his velvet cap like a schoolboy, in the excitement of his satisfaction,

"My dear," he said, "I will show you the world. You shall enjoy the trip, if it rests with me."

"She has not seen much of it so far, poor child! Winsthorpe is a somewhat out of the way place for young people, and of late, I have felt no inclination for going about; the change will brighten her up."

"I am bright enough, papa," she laughed, but there was a wistful look in her beautiful eyes.

"By-the-by, Adela, your father heard from an old friend of yours to-day," said her mother.

"To be sure," struck in the Rector, "from Egerton. He says his uncle, Lord Lyneston, you know, is in a very shaky state, and wants him to come home and see him, and has offered to pay his expenses if he can get leave to do so; so we may have a visit from him in your absence. Scamp, to cheer us up!"

Sir Richard knew nothing of Major Egerton, and taking no interest in the conversation was talking to Mrs. Thorndyke about the arrangements for the projected trip, and failed to see the pallor grow upon Adela's cheek.

Her first feeling was a sense of wild disappointment, that should Cecil revisit Winsthorpe she should not be there to welcome him.

Her second was one of deep relief that she should be spared the meeting.

Not only had he left her, and misjudged her in his passionate anger and jealousy, but he had not once sent her a kindly word since he had been away, when that anger must have cooled, when his sense and judgment should have spoken in her favour.

"Pity the old man married," continued the Rector; "had he not done so Cecil would have had a fine property. As it is, Lord Lyneston wishes him to undertake the guardianship of his son, from the age of twelve to eighteen, personally; and it is about this he is desirous to see him. Before then he is to remain under his mother's care. Egerton says he will come home if he can, but that he shall only be in England a few days."

"Where is Lord Lyneston living?" asked Adela, for the sake of something to say.

"His estate is in Derbyshire, and the scenery around is the most beautiful which England can produce. We might have had a peep at it had the place fallen into Cecil's hands; but he does not say a word as to whether his uncle is at home, or health-seeking elsewhere."

"At home, I should fancy, if he is so feeble," said Adela, thoughtfully.

And at that moment Lord Carruthers was announced.

He looked such a perfect gentleman as he entered the room in his evening clothes, and so handsome, that Adela glanced at him in surprise.

Often as she had seen him she had never been struck by his appearance as she now was, and the greetings over he secured the vacant seat by her side, and held it in possession.

In the meantime Lilian had thrown her arms round the neck of Horace's mother, and had burst into joyous tears.

"My dear, what is it?" inquired Mrs. Lake, holding her to her breast, and patting her back, as though she were soothing an infant.

"Nothing indeed, only I am so happy, and so is Horace," she answered, smiling through her tears. "Papa has been so kind! Oh! dear Mrs. Lake, he has really consented to our being married in two years' time!"

"Then no wonder the boy wrote me such a bright note!" returned Mrs. Lake, her face like a sunbeam.

"One thing may disappoint you and Mr. Lake, perhaps," continued the girl shyly. "I am not to inherit papa's property or money, but of that Horace says he is rather glad than

otherwise; he would not like to be dependent upon his wife."

"And quite right too; I admire his spirit. I had not a sixpence when his father married me, and no couple could be happier than we have been; but it will be a change for you, my dear, to live on his means."

"Do you think I shall mind that?" asked Lilian, softly.

"Not if you love him truly!"

"I do love him with all my heart," she answered, with her bright eyes looking straight into those of Horace's mother. "I do love him, and I want you to try and care for me for his sake."

"It won't be very difficult, my dear; I was fond of you as a child. Of late years we have not seen each other, but I have thought kindly of you because you were true to my boy. Yes, dear, I can, and do, and will love you," she answered, warmly.

"Thank you very much," returned the girl in a low voice. "I never had the comfort of a mother's love; I was so young when she died, and I have so often longed for her gentle guidance."

"You will have Horace to guide you now, darling," said Mrs. Lake, smoothing the soft dark hair from her brow; "and I will be a mother to you, Lilian, if you will let me," and they sealed the compact with a kiss of sincere affection.

While this conversation was being carried on in Lilian's room, another was in progress in Sir Richard's bedchamber, between Mr. Lake and his son.

"This is an unexpected surprise to see you and my mother here, father," said Horace, his handsome face aglow with pleasure.

"Just so, my boy; no one could have been more taken aback than I was when the Baronet sent for me this afternoon."

"What! have you been here before to-day? Then I suppose you know all about everything."

"I conclude I do."

"And what do you think of it?"

"Well, my opinion, in confidence, is that the Baronet is cracked."

Horace looked at his father blankly.

"Have you heard of his scheme to get rid of you?"

"To get rid of me?" echoed the son.

"Yes! he is willing to spend at least five hundred pounds for his whim."

Horace Lake turned pale.

The gladness died out of his face, and he sat down as though all the strength had gone out of him.

"Go on," he said, much agitated. "Let me hear all."

"Why, the long and the short of it is, that he wants to get you out of the way for the winter. I have an idea that he wishes to clear the coast for someone else, and thinks that if Lilian does not see you, that she will forget you."

"Lilian forget me!" retorted Horace scornfully. "Never!"

"Well, I can account for his proceedings in no other way. He is willing to pay all expenses if you will ship yourself off to do some pretended business for him abroad."

"But what is his object? He starts himself this day week."

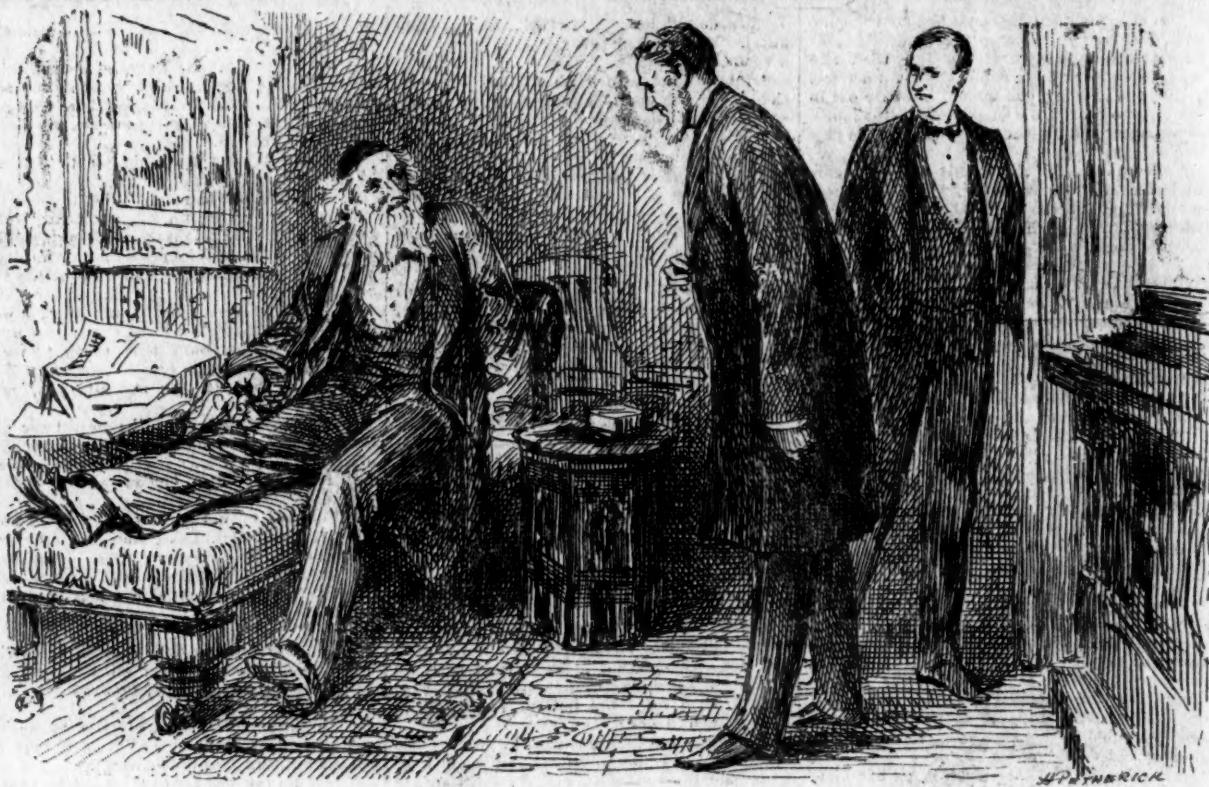
"The deuce he does! That is the day he said you were to go. Does Miss Lilian accompany him?"

"Certainly, and Adela Thorndyke too."

"Then he must be mad!"

"Heaven forbid, for Lilian's sake! And where am I to go?" asked Horace suddenly.

"Well, queer as the offer is, I should not refuse it if I were you, Horace. You have looked harassed of late, and it will secure you a long rest and a pleasant winter. He wishes you to go to Mentone for some months, but he



"YOU DON'T OFTEN CATCH ME NAPPING, MR. LAKE," SAID SIR RICHARD WITH A GRIM SMILE.

has no objection to your visiting Paris on your way, and amusing yourself there or elsewhere as well."

"To Mentone?" almost shouted Horace, sunshine bursting out with a sudden beam upon his handsome face, while he sprang to his feet with so rapid a movement as nearly to upset his father.

"Dear, dear old man. I see it all now!"

"Do you?" replied his father, drily. "I confess I don't. If I might venture to express an opinion, I should say there is madness in the air at Marsden Hall. I have been a shrewd lawyer for the past thirty years and more, and I can see through most things, but here the atmosphere is too dense for my vision, I must confess. I am sent for as if it were on a matter of life and death; and when I arrive I am asked to send my son away for six months, for no other reason, as far as I can find out, except to humour some ridiculous fancy. Then I am invited to dinner as a sop, and the moment I enter the room the Rector congratulates me upon the Dickens knows what, and now you have caught the infection too, by Jove!"

Horace burst out laughing.

"I don't believe you know, after all. Didn't mother tell you?"

"She said you were delighted at being asked here."

"Of course I am. What else do you know?"

"That you're as cracked as the rest!" replied Mr. Lake, irritably. "I never was good at riddles; I'm too old to enjoy them by far."

"Dad," said Horace, with a bright and happy face; "if I am at all insane, it is with joy."

"I only see—well; I know nothing of the

cause," returned the lawyer, "but if you are sane enough to explain yourself I confess I shall be glad."

"This is Lilian's birthday," began Horace.

"So her father informed me; we're here in honour of it," snarled Mr. Lake.

"Sir Richard, you know, has been ill," continued his son, "and Adela has been nursing him. Under her gentle influence his heart has softened strangely of late."

"It was soft enough twenty-five years ago, before sorrow soured him," said the lawyer reflectively. "If you wanted a kind action done Sir Richard Freemantle was the man to apply to."

"I can believe it now," replied Horace, earnestly. "A week ago I could not have done so; but yesterday he sent for me, and questioned me, in his would-be-rough manner, as to my love for his daughter, who he told me would not inherit his property if she married me. I assured him that I wanted nothing with her; that I would rather work for my own wife than let her be beholden to anyone else for what she required; and he seemed pleased. He then desired me to call at half-past eight this morning, and when Lilian came down he gave me to her, in his own peculiar way, as though the thing was a joke rather than a serious sacrifice to his pride and prejudice. Then, as it was my dear girl's birthday, he kept me to spend it with her, and at lunch he told us that he is going to Mentone for the winter months."

"He is going to Mentone himself!" interrupted Mr. Lake.

"Just so, father, and if he has fixed this day week for me to start he means me to accompany them."

"And he actually has consented to your engagement? Well, the world must be coming to an end

"It is just beginning for me, dad. I have often thought myself happy before, but to-day I have really begun to live; and now that you do understand, father, let me hear that you are pleased."

"For your sake I am; very much so, my boy," replied his father kindly; "although for my own I would rather you had chosen a wife from our own set. Miss Lilian is a very nice girl, but she will miss her grand style of life when she comes to inhabit a lath-and-plaster villa."

"Lilian is the truest girl on earth!"

"No doubt she loves you, but she is not likely to be much of a daughter to people with our quiet ways."

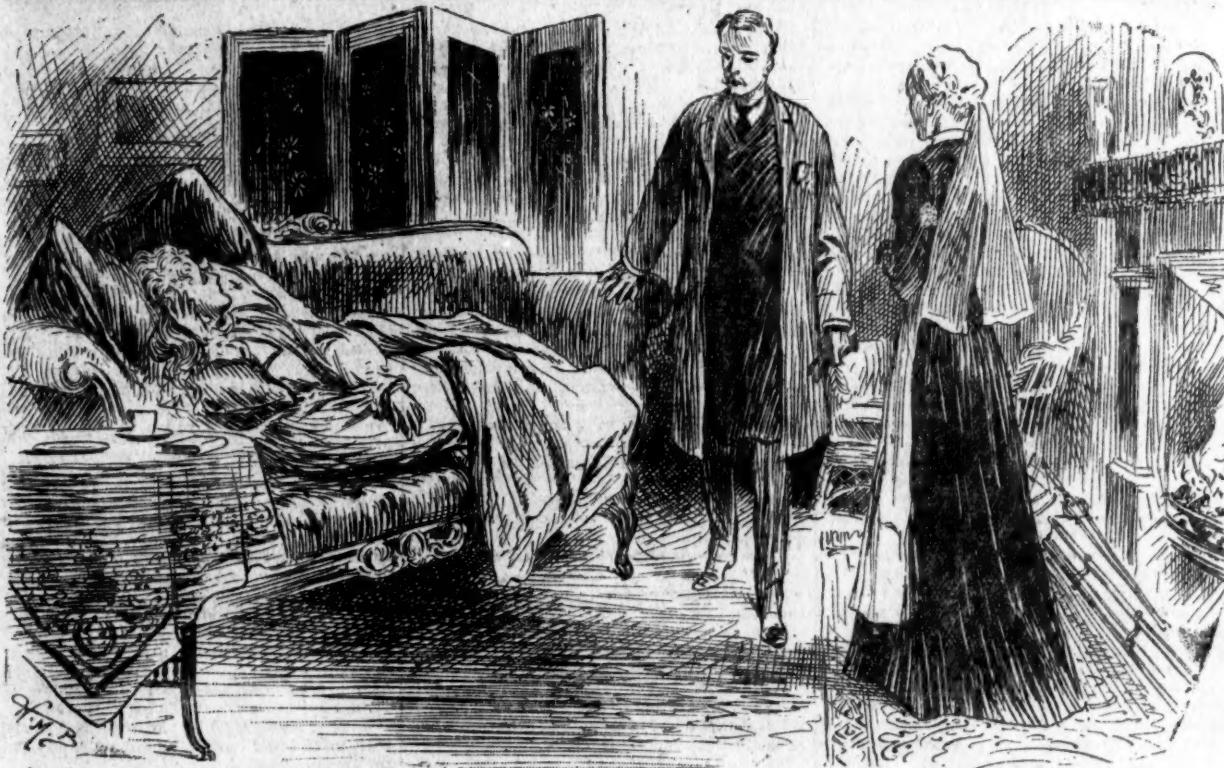
"You don't know her," replied his son. "She will love my home and my parents, all for my sake, father. Have no fear about her whatever."

"Then, my boy, you have won a treasure!"

"I have," answered Horace, gladly; and father and son clasped hands as the gong sounded for dinner, and both hastened downstairs.

(To be continued.)

HE SAW AND BELIEVED.—Pat had heard reports affecting a bank in which he had deposited his savings. Presenting himself at the paying teller's window he said peremptorily: "I want me money!" The official thus addressed, quietly took his book, counted out the correct amount and handed it out. "Then you've got it?" exclaimed the depositor, his ire subsiding. "There it is," replied the teller. "I don't want it! You may keep it!" And he went away satisfied of the bank's solidity.



THE YOUNG DOCTOR THOUGHT HE HAD NEVER SEEN A FACE AT ONCE SO BEAUTIFUL AND SO SAD.

IVY'S PERIL.

PROLOGUE.

It was a street in London, within a mile of the Victoria Station—a long, straight, narrow thoroughfare, with houses on either side, and, to my thinking, not a single charm to attract people to reside there.

And yet Primrose-street was quite a valuable property to its owner; the grim, time-stained houses were seldom empty. As a rule, too, their tenants were respectable.

People who lived by their wits or by trading on the credulity of their fellow-creatures avoided Primrose-street; perhaps because they feared the prim, dull atmosphere of dingy, shabby, genteel respectability would blunt their cleverness.

As a rule, the folks who lived in the uninteresting thoroughfare alluded to were those who toiled honestly for their daily bread. No one ever resided there many years, for this startling reason—they generally came when they were at a very low ebb of prosperity; then a year or two inevitably brought about a change. Either they grew so poor that a house of any kind was an impossibility to them, or else they began to "get on," and the very first sign of that last delightful fact was their seeking a more cheerful abode.

There was one house in the street distinguished beyond its fellows. Number ninety-nine boasted steps of dazzling whiteness, and windows which would have done credit to Belgravia.

The door, moreover, had been repainted, adorned with a ponderous knocker in the shape of a dog's head, while a brass plate inscribed "Marcus Ward, surgeon," shed a halo of talent over the house.

Perhaps Primrose-street and its neighbourhood possessed unusually robust health; perhaps the inhabitants distrusted a medical adviser living in their midst. Certain it was that patients did not flock to Mr. Ward. He was never requested to hurry out to a sick-bed, and no one called to consult him about their symptoms.

"It's hard," soliloquised the young man, one dreary afternoon in dull November, when the little back parlour, which he made his sitting-room, seemed more dreary and desolate than ever.

His was a cheerful spirit. He had borne much disappointment without flinching; but now his heart failed him. His little stock of ready money was ebbing fast, and he was literally at his wit's end.

He was a clever fellow, had toiled honestly at his profession, and for three years been the qualified assistant of a country physician. The latter died, and without friends to purchase a practise the thought came to the young man to start on his own account in London, and see what industry, patience, and perseverance would do to advance his fortunes.

He arrived in January; this was November, and they had done nothing.

He buried his face in his hands, and tried to mark out his future course; but he could think of nothing.

The furniture of that small house, and a balance of perhaps twenty pounds at the bank constituted his all. When that should be gone ruin stared him in the face.

The day was closing in. Mark had his hand on the bell to ring for lights when a thundering knock at the door resounded through the house.

"A Patient!" thought the young man, hope-

fully; then, remembering his future disappointments, "pooh! more likely the tax collector."

But in spite of that prudent determination not to believe in coming good fortune, he listened with intense eagerness to the conversation between his servant and the intruder. Two minutes, and a gentleman was shown in.

Marcus Ward was a young man—five-and-twenty at the most; but he was a judge of character.

Almost without knowing it, and though the new-comer was his first client, and evidently well-to-do, his impression was most unfavourable.

He saw a man of middle height, some years his senior, with a smooth, clean-shaven face, and that peculiar expression which is best described as whitish-brown. Hair, eyelashes, and eyebrows seemed almost colourless.

The most striking features were the eyes and mouth. The first were light hazel, large and clear, but shifting in their expression as though they could not meet your gaze. The mouth was compressed, and told of great resolution and firm will.

The visitor was dressed in the extreme of fashion, the colour of his overcoat bordered with fur, and a diamond ring of great value flashing on his finger.

"Mr. Ward, I believe!" he said, affably; then as Mark bowed, "Any relation to the Mr. Ward once with [Dr. Daniel, of Stamford?]

"The same."

"My dear sir, I am delighted, then I can at once proceed with the object of my visit. My wife is seriously ill, and I want you to come to her at once!"

He had laid his card on the table, it was endorsed "George Gresham."

"What are Mrs. Gresham's symptoms—has she been ill long?" asked Mr. Ward not immaterially, as he prepared to accompany the anxious husband.

"I hardly know; it seems a gradual fading away. I sometimes doubt if she is quite right here," and he touched his own forehead. "She has the strangest aversion to doctors, won't see one at any price; but this Dr. Daniel attended her when she was a child, and she has great faith in him. If I introduce you as his friend, she is sure to answer your questions."

It was a very simple statement, but Mark felt himself recoil more and more from the man as he listened. He took his hat and rose, so as to show Mr. Gresham he was quite ready to set out.

A fly was waiting, and they drove towards Clapham. As they went on Mr. Ward marvelled more and more why in the name of wonder had not the man consulted a physician in his own neighbourhood? Or, if he chose to employ a doctor from such a distance, why had he not summoned some celebrity instead of an untried embryo surgeon?

Perhaps Mr. Gresham guessed the subject of the doctor's thoughts, for he said suddenly,—

"I am aware, of course, that our being so far off will entail a great loss of your time, but I assure you pecuniary considerations will be of no moment to me. My wife is all I have, and her health my first object."

The surgeon bowed, and the fly stopped before a pleasant detached house. The gentleman sprang out, opened the door with a little key and invited Mr. Ward into the drawing-room, while he prepared Mrs. Gresham for his visit. Marks of ample wealth were scattered about; the carpet was of velvet pile, the furniture in pale blue and ebony; but what struck Mr. Ward more than all was a water-coloured sketch of the church at Starham, where he had attended Sunday after Sunday with Dr. Daniel, *vis-à-vis* to it being another drawing, perhaps from the same pencil. It represented a young girl gathering wild flowers in a village lane; the lane was perfectly familiar to Mark, he had been up it hundreds of times, but the girl's face was strange to him.

He was so occupied watching these drawings that he did not hear his host re-enter, and only looked up at the sound of his voice.

"My wife is ready to see you. I fear she is worse to-night. I never saw her so strange."

A respectably-dressed woman servant admitted the doctor to a room on the first floor.

Gresham said, rather uncomfortably, he would wait for tidings downstairs, so only the nurse—as he concluded her to be—witnessed Marcus Ward's first introduction to his patient.

She was lying on a sofa drawn close to the fire, and the young doctor thought he had never seen a face at once so beautiful, and so sad.

Her skin was colourless as alabaster, save that on each cheek there flashed one vivid hectic spot. Her dark blue eyes were so large and lustrous that they seemed almost too bright for the small, thin face.

Her waving hair strayed in curls over her forehead, and there hung in a golden shower down her back. She was wrapped in a dressing-gown of pale blue cashmere—a fur rug was thrown over her feet. She half raised her eyes as Mr. Ward entered, and said, in a voice whose sadness thrilled his very heart.—

"Please go away. You can do nothing for me. I only want to die!"

The young doctor looked at her in surprise. He had been in some measure prepared to find her peculiar, but this sad outburst struck him more as the cry of one in some deep mental trouble than the complaint of a mind demented. Instead of obeying her, however, he drew a chair to the side of the couch, and sat down.

"Will you tell me where you are suffering?" he asked, kindly.

The nurse took the answer on herself, and gave a list of ailments which would have been equally ascribable to weakness, consumption, or low fever.

Mark noticed Mrs. Gresham shuddered as the woman spoke. Clearly the nurse was no favourite with her mistress.

"I think Mrs. Gresham is faint for want of nourishment," he said, affably to the attendant. "If you went down and prepared her a cup of strong beef tea it might give her strength to answer my questions."

"I don't want 'any!'" replied the patient. "Don't go, Jane! I won't be left alone!"

Jane, who had shown great annoyance at the thought of being dismissed by the doctor, changed her mood so soon as she saw Mrs. Gresham, instead of catching at a chance of a *tete-a-tete*, was troubled at the idea. The invalid sank back, apparently prostrated, and the nurse bustled out.

Marcus Ward felt the strongest impulse to close the door on her, but prudence kept him back. He would have staked his life that there was some terrible mystery about Mrs. Gresham's history—but of its nature he had no idea. He bent over her; and, instead of asking any medical questions, said,—

"You have given me a great deal of pleasure!"

"I?"

She had recovered from the passing faintness. Her voice was perfectly clear and distinct.

"Yes; downstairs I saw two pictures of a place where I spent some very happy years. I only left Starham last January, and I have never felt at home since."

A faint look of surprise crossed her face.

"Is it true then? I would not believe it when he told me you came from there!"

"I was Dr. Daniel's assistant for three years. I went to him about four years ago."

"Aha! and I was there five years ago myself!"

"You liked the place I fancy, or you would not care to have its picture on your walls?"

"Like it! she murmured. "I loved it dearly! I was born there!"

Mark felt his brain bewildered. Evidently she had lived in Starham till five years ago, and from all he saw of her she had filled no inferior place there. Had he ever heard of her from his friends and acquaintance in the pleasant town?

"We both love Starham," he said, gently. "Don't you think you can trust me, and let me do my best to cure you for your husband's sake?"

She turned on him with flashing eyes.

"My husband's sake! Has he taken you in too?"

They heard Jane's footsteps returning. Mark said, hurriedly—

"Only tell me how to help you!"

"You will be true to me?"

"Yes—yes! How can I convince you?"

Her answer amazed him.

"Agree with all Mr. Gresham says. Tell him I am weak and fanciful. Get him to trust you."

Re-enter Jane with the beef tea. Mr. Ward took it from her, and handed it to Mrs. Gresham. Then he made a few brief medical inquiries, and went back to Mr. Gresham in the drawing-room.

"Well!"

His own instincts would have been to tell the invalid's husband she needed every care, and bright, loving companionship to cheer her, but he could not refuse her one request to him.

"I think Mrs. Gresham very delicate, but the illness is chiefly on the nerves."

"Just so—a little queer here," and Gresham touched his forehead lightly.

"Perhaps. I should like to see more of her before giving an opinion!"

"Well, come every day; two or three times a day if you can spare time, I shan't grumble

at the bill. Don't look offended. My case is a peculiar one. I am at daggers drawn with every member of my wife's family. I'd rather spend every farthing I have in the world than they should have it in their power to say I didn't do my best for my poor girl!"

"Has she any children?"

"One!" returned Mr. Gresham, composedly. "But, poor little thing, she was so neglected when her mother's illness set in I put her to school. She is a little too young, but it was better for her than being here."

"Does not her mother miss her?"

He shook his head mournfully,—

"My poor Dora is not an affectionate mother. I think it was a positive relief to her when the child went. I have asked her repeatedly if she wished for her back, but she only shakes her head."

Mr. Ward sent in a mild tonic, and returned home to sit far into the night, thinking over the extraordinary mystery which seemed to hang over Dora Gresham.

He had not written to Starham for months, when he had only failures to confide. He gave up writing, but he sent a long familiar letter to the curate, who had lived there ten years, and been his favourite companion. Like many another he left the object of the epistle to the end, and merely said, in conclusion, that "one of his patients" (a mild fib to speak of them in the plural number) had lived at Starham. Her name was Dora Gresham; she was twenty-four and very beautiful, her complaint being more of the mind than body. If his friend could at all help him to bring about a reconciliation with her family, it would be much for her benefit.

Marcus Ward regarded the letter as a model of eloquence, and was a little disappointed when the answer came.

The Rev. Hugh Ainslie professed great interest in Mrs. Gresham's case, but he declared she had never lived in Starham; from her age she must have been married not more than six years before. None of his lady parishioners had gone away to be married, and he was certain no George Gresham had ever plighted his troth in Starham church; it must be some mistake of the patient's disordered brain.

Mark bit his lip. He wished the curate could have seen Dora's face, and the pictures of Starham from her pencil, but he did not write and tell Mr. Ainslie he was in the wrong. He contented himself with visiting his patient at Laburnum Lodge with the greatest care, and doing all he could for her mind and body.

With one he succeeded before he had been visiting her a month. He had got her to feel she trusted him, perverse and sullen both to her husband and the nurse. In their absence she would be another creature, but she never bestowed any confidences on Mark, and if he asked her—as he often did—if there was no service he could render her, she always made the same reply,—

"Not yet."

Meanwhile—astonishing fact—Mark's practice had really begun to exist. Perhaps the seeing him repeatedly sent for in a fly, and driven off at all hours, convinced the neighbourhood he must be of some skill, or his services would not be required by people able to provide flies.

First, one person in Primrose-street sent for him to attend a bad case of rheumatic fever. Then one or two ladies thought he looked fond of children, and summoned him for their offspring; and so, by January, so far from despairing, his prospects really looked quite encouraging; and the balance in the bank, instead of dwindling, had been added to.

Mr. Gresham always paid him on the spot in guinea fees. Mark had suggested once or twice he was not a physician; but the other had retorted his loss of time in coming so far ought to be taken into consideration.

He was always scrupulously polite—nay, cordial to the young doctor. He appeared to have the most flattering opinion of his skill; but still the weeks crept on, and Mark's aversion to Mr. Gresham continued, and that gentleman's wife made no progress.

The case puzzled Mark. Apart from being his first London patient, apart from Mr. Gresham's liberality, he longed to cure his wife. She was so beautiful, so girlish, it seemed hard the grave should claim her as its victim; besides, she had no organic disease.

As a doctor, Mark knew there was nothing in her state to preclude the hope of recovery, and yet she faded day by day.

At last Mr. Ward took upon himself to suggest further advice. It was one morning before he saw his patient that he took this step. George Gresham looked puzzled.

"Perhaps you'll tell her yourself," he said simply. "I never dare mention it. Poor child! she has got hold of the notion I want to shut her up in a lunatic asylum. She happens to know the signature of two doctors are required, and so has set her face against another opinion. It's a little hard on a man when he does all he can for his wife to be treated like that."

"Very," said Mark, who felt that, at any cost for Dora's sake, he must keep in her husband's favour.

"I don't want to complain; but I've spent money like water. I've taken her to every place I can think of for change of air. She might see my one object is her recovery, and yet she shuns me."

Mark looked at him gravely.

"That is a feature of the disease. Shall I go up to Mrs. Gresham?"

He was earlier than usual, and, perhaps, for that reason the nurse was absent.

Mrs. Gresham was seated by the window writing; for the first time since he knew her Mark actually found her occupied. She greeted him with a wan smile.

"The end is very near, I think," she said, gently. "You have been all kindness, Mr. Ward; but the case is beyond human skill."

"I have been telling Mr. Gresham I want to try more experienced aid than mine. Should you really object to another opinion?"

"Not if it is needful."

"Mr. Gresham feared it might distress you."

"Not at all. Was that him gone out?" as the door banged.

"Yes. He has taken the prescription to the chemist's. Your nurse seems to be out?"

"Yes."

Then to his astonishment she added,—

"Please ring the bell."

"But is there anyone to come?"

"Oh, yes; the cook."

Mr. Ward wondered he had never seen her. She came up at once—a pleasant, fresh complexioned young woman, evidently kindly-disposed to her invalid mistress.

Mark's first thought was, "This woman knows nothing"; his second, "Mr. Gresham would not like her being here."

"Mary," said Dora Gresham, in her sweet, weak voice, "I have been writing a letter, and my hand is so altered perhaps they won't know it. I want you to see me sign it, and to write your name below mine."

The cook consented at once. She watched the delicate fingers trace "Helen Dorothea Gresham," and then wrote "Mary Brown" underneath, rather laboriously, but still distinctly. At a glance from the invalid, Mark wrote his name beneath the cook's.

"Mary," said the invalid, as the woman was leaving the room, "you won't tell Jane?"

"I'll tell nobody, ma'am, and it's proud I am to do you a service."

Dora put the paper into Mark's hand.

"You know Starham? You must have heard of Mr. Greenshaw?"

"I know him well."

"When I am gone post that to him. Promise me, but not till then!"

"I promise; but, indeed, I do not think you need fear any immediate danger."

"I do not fear it!"

"And I may tell Mr. Gresham you do not object to a second opinion?"

"Yes."

Mark hesitated.

"I have heard you have a little girl. Surely if you really feel your time is short you would like her to come to you?"

Dora shuddered from head to foot.

"Oh, no; anything but that! I could not bear it! It would drive me mad!"

For once Mark did not pity her.

"Yet most women find the touch of baby fingers the greatest comfort in their pain. I cannot understand how one so fair and true as you can have a child, and yet not love her!"

"Not love her?" the blue eyes were heavy with unshed tears, the voice was filled with a mute roar. "Not love her? Do you think it cost me nothing to put her from me? Do you think I don't wake in the night, and yearn for a look at her face, or touch of her little hand? Ah, Mr. Ward, if I loved her less she would be here!"

It was mystery on mystery. He could only answer,—

"Forgive me! I did not mean to wound you!"

"You have not wounded me! It is not your fault! You have not the key!"

He tried to recall her to calm.

"I think your little girl is at school?"

"Yes, at St. John's Wood, Acacia Lodge, Cedar Road. The address seems burnt into my brain. Mr. Ward, you asked just now if there was nothing you could do for me in time to come. If ever my little girl needs a friend will you help her for my sake?"

"Willingly, if it be in my power!"

But he little dreamed how his promise was to be recalled to him. He little imagined his pledge would be demanded of him more than fifteen years later.

Mr. Gresham had returned, and came into the sick room. Dora's eyes drooped as he looked at her. She never seemed at ease in her husband's presence.

"I have been speaking to your wife," said Mark, gently; "and she quite agrees to a second opinion. Whom shall we have?"

"I leave the choice entirely to you. Better say the day after to-morrow. That will leave you plenty of time to make arrangements, and let us know the hour for the consultation."

Mark agreed, observing he did not think he should be there the next day. His patient did not look surprised, only as he pressed her hand she murmured the one word,—

"Remember."

That evening he took the papers he had placed huddled in his pocket, and smoothed them out with a view to putting them into some place of safety. Besides the papers he had signed there were two letters, one endorsed "To my Sister," the other "For my much-loved child."

Mark put all these in a large, official-looking envelope, and directed it to James Greenshaw, Esq., Market-place, Starham. He intended to lock it in his desk, but his keys not being downstairs he returned the packet to his great-coat pocket.

The next day was a busy one; many cases turned up, and he was out till quite late; he had made every arrangement with the great man, Dr. Gordon; so famous in all cases of hysteria, to go down to Clapham the next morning at eleven o'clock. He was enjoying a little well-earned repose when a cab rattled up to the door. It was Mr. Gresham's cook—the mistress was much worse, would Mr. Ward come to her at once.

Mark needed no second entreaty; he took up

his great coat—the papers still in his pocket—and followed Mary to the waiting cab.

"This must have been a very sudden attack?" he remarked, as they drove along; and she looked at him keenly, but she said nothing—he felt uncomfortable at her silence.

"I suppose you have been with Mrs. Gresham some time?"

"Three months, sir."

"Your mistress's illness has been very rapid. I am told in October she was in good health."

"I daresay."

There was no getting anything out of her; perhaps his first opinion was regret that she knew nothing, only as they reached Clapham, she said suddenly,—

"You think I'm changed since yesterday, doctor!" and she looked him full in the face with her honest brown eyes. "And so I am; there's that come to me has well nigh friz the marrow in my bones. You've asked me a sight of questions, now I'd like to ask you two—did you ever see an illness just like Mrs. Gresham's?"

"Never one in all particulars the same."

"Ah! It is what I expected ye to say, but I'd rather have been mistaken. And now comes my next question; is there any right name for it?"

"Of course there is—excessive weakness, a form of decline."

"Ah!" Mary seemed to ruminant, and then went off to her own affairs. "I shall not stay at Clapham after Mrs. Gresham dies. I shall live in Farmer-street, Kennington; my young man's a tidy shop there, and I reckon we'll be married at once."

Mark wondered why she told him all this, and the certainty with which she spoke of Mrs. Gresham's death amazed him.

"And now I've a favour to ask of you, sir. I'm fond of the mistress though I haven't known her long, and I fancy if I'd have nursed her instead of Jane she would never have been so bad. If ever in your practice you ever come across another case just like Mrs. Gresham's, I wish you would let me know!"

It was a strange request, and Mark told her so.

"I have my reasons," returned the cook. "I shall be Mrs. John Tibbet then, and living at 15, Farmer-street, Kennington. I don't believe you'll ever have another case just like Mrs. Gresham's, but I think you might promise you'd tell me if you did."

Impressed in spite of himself, Mark took down the cook's future name and address.

"But I haven't by no means given up your mistress as a hopeless case. I am going to bring Dr. Gordon, the great man in nervous diseases, to see her to-morrow."

"I don't think he'll come, sir!"

"He has promised. The appointment is for eleven o'clock."

"He won't see the mistress," returned the cook, with conviction.

They were at the house now. The door opened without their knocking, and Mr. Gresham appeared in the hall.

"It is all over! My poor wife died half-an-hour after Mary left the house!"

Mark went upstairs. It was quite true. There she lay, beautiful and fragile as she had been in life, but she seemed even more so in death. A peace ineffable was stamped upon her brow, and the lines sorrow had written on her fair young face were smoothed away by the gentle finger of death.

As he turned from the room he came face to face with Mary, who had glided upstairs after him. Their eyes met, and by some magnetic influence the thought hidden in her heart was laid bare before him. He knew the reason of her strange questions, and her strange petitions. The woman saw the change in his face, and guessed he had discovered her secret.

"Law, sir," she said, with a kindly attempt to comfort the blank misery written on his brow. "You mustn't go to fret about it, it's not your fault any more than it's mine."

Perhaps she meant Mrs. Gresham's death, and fancied the young surgeon believed that greater skill than his own might have saved his patient; but if this were so his answer was peculiar.

"I ought to have prevented it."

"Law, sir, you couldn't—and she's better off, poor dear. I never heard her story, but I always felt she'd gone through a sea of trouble. Well, she's at rest now."

Mark shook her toil-worn hand.

"And you'll not forget, sir?"

"No, Mary; I'll remember."

He went downstairs, and gave the certificate of death; but his hand trembled strangely as he wrote it out; and Mr. Gresham, who watched him attentively, remarked it.

"You are quite upset. I always thought you doctors grew inured to misery and death. You see enough of it!"

"We can't grow into mere machines always Mr. Gresham. At least I hope I never shall."

"You will come to the funeral?"

But Mr. Ward excused himself, and, what was stranger still, he did not seem to see Mr. Gresham's outstretched hand as he said good-bye.

To be sure, his fingers were busy with the fastenings of his great coat, so that may have explained the seeming rudeness.

He went straight to the post-office, and sent poor Dora's missive on its way to Mr. Grimshaw; then he went home, fully determining not to lose sight of the strange drama in which he had unwittingly played a part.

His intentions were first-rate. He meant to go to Acacia Lodge, and warn the schoolmistress of the death of her pupil's mother. He had even ideas of running down to Starham, and telling Mr. Grimshaw all that had happened.

He went to bed in the fullest belief he was going to hold a great influence over the fate of poor Dora's child.

He woke in the morning to have all his schemes frustrated by means of the penny post. One of the many medical appointments for which he had applied so vainly in the days of his despair chanced to be partly in the gift of a gentleman well-known to his father, and who remembered Mark from a boy.

Sir Guy Cheviot would not send a word of hope to his *protégé* till success was certain, and, unluckily, there was another candidate whose merits seemed beyond young Ward's, and he was elected one week before the vessel sailed which was to take him to the distant colony where a large military hospital would be under his charge.

He succumbed to a short, but sharp attack of pleurisy.

Sir Guy wrote and offered the post to Marcus Ward, with one solitary condition, that he should be ready to avail himself of the berth engaged for his predecessor in the good ship *Syria*, which left for Calcutta just three days after Mark would receive his letter.

The surgeon hesitated a moment. Most men have a lingering regard for their native land, even if she has not been so kind to them as they may have expected; but his prospects in England were nil.

Mrs. Gresham's had been an exceptional case—he could not hope for many like it. Nay, as he remembered Mary's glance, and all it conveyed, he felt he would rather starve than have one such other. A general practitioner in Primrose Street had not much of a chance, as he knew. Thanks to Mrs. Gresham, and the few patients tempted to follow by the sight of the flies at his door, he had fifty pounds in the bank. His year's tenancy of ninety-nine was up

at Lady Day, and he had not yet given notice to renew his lease, so that a cheque for ten pounds set him free of his landlord's claims. Eight hundred a year, an important post, and a house—or rather bungalow—furnished with servants, surely that was better than waiting on in London, S.W., to see what fate might have in store for him?

One sigh to Dora's memory, another to the thought of the motherless child he had meant to befriend, and then Marcus Ward's resolution was taken, and a note of acceptance to Sir Guy posted.

It is astonishing how fast people can get themselves *out* of a position. Mark woke up a doctor, with a settled home, a small establishment, and smaller practice. He went to bed a guest at an hotel, the furniture having been sold cheap to a broker, the landlord having resumed the keys with a cheque, and the servant having been dismissed with a month's wages in lieu of notice. He was a man of few intimacies, and no relations.

Hugh Ainslie had annoyed him by not helping him in the mystery of Dora Gresham. He had no other confidential friend at Starham, and so it came about no one in the little town heard of their late doctor's departure for the far East. A bill was put up in number ninety-nine, informing the public that comfortable and convenient residence was to let. The servant met with another place, the furniture had a new owner, the few patients, who had at last found their way to Marcus Ward, were a little disgusted at his deserting them; but they speedily consoled themselves with another medical adviser.

Marcus Ward was young, honest, and clever, but it really seemed as though no one in the whole breadth of the land felt any great interest in his departure. Stay, though; that is not quite true no one felt any regret; but two persons displayed a considerable amount of interest.

At a fashionable hotel at Brighton a gentleman was supping with a lady in a private sitting room, and, evidently being on most intimate terms, thought he might enjoy the newspaper, despite her presence.

The list of passengers by the *Cyria* chanced to meet his eye. He read it through, and started up waving his hand, and almost wild with delight.

"Here's a stroke of luck! I never expected that. That young idiot, Ward, has gone to Calcutta!"

"Really! Perhaps it's a relation?"

"Oh, no; Marcus Ward, surgeon. Did you ever hear of such good luck, Jenny?"

"It's wonderful! Then I suppose we need not think any more of London."

The man chuckled.

"Not a bit of it! We'll go back to London the first thing to-morrow morning!"

He kissed her lightly as he spoke. She was bedizened with ribbons and jewels till it was difficult to recognise her; but no one who had once seen her companion could fail to recognise George Gresham.

It was poor Dora's husband who exulted in the departure of Mr. Ward for India. The surgeon and Mary were quite right in their surmises. The true story of Dora's death had yet to be given to the world. If Mr. Gresham could manage it the world would never enjoy that story; and he felt the managing would be tolerably easy now since the wide ocean rolled between him and the only person he feared.

(To be continued.)

TECK: "What's the matter, Hen? You look tired." Peck: "Yes, I've been a victim of dyspepsia for the last few days." Teck: "Why, you've often told me you weren't subject to it at all." Peck: "I'm not, but my wife is."

DUDLEY ERRINGTON'S SECRETARY.

Continued from page 488.

No; she couldn't tell where he lived. From something she had heard him say in the passage, a few days ago, she fancied he had moved into a new lodging, a good way off. He might be about to-day; she couldn't tell. But he came in the evening, when he knew Miss Lovell was in.

Errington's next step was to go to a private detective. He had, of course, no photographs; but he was a clever draughtsman, and he gave the detective—Brown by name—two capital sketches of Godfrey and Nina, the latter, naturally, being the most accurate.

"I only saw Mr. Lovell once," he said; "but I fancy you would be able to know him from that. I want you to set a watch on the house, No. — street, Camden Town; and if he goes to it, he is to be tracked home. And let me know his address."

"Certainly, sir. The young lady," remarked Mr. Brown, "is safe to be noticed. It's such a very uncommon face, sir! You don't think she'll have gone abroad?"

"Most likely not. She could not have had much money, and would not want to spend more than she could help! She may be in London; but she has probably left it. She would be almost sure to call herself by another name! You must leave no stone unturned, so long as there is no publicity—no description sent to the ordinary police, no advertising, no step taken that might cause anything to get into the papers!"

"I quite understand, sir. It may be a difficult job; but nothing to many I have had! I'll let you know, sir, the moment I hear anything, however slight."

And Errington went back to Adelphi-terrace; but he could do no work that day, and little enough for many days to come. But in all his anguish he never once doubted Nina!

The result of the watch upon the house in Camden Town was nil. Godfrey Lovell had not, during four days, put in an appearance. This looked as if he knew of his cousin's flight; for the landlady told Errington he had been there the evening on which she left, and had never been more than two days without coming in.

No wonder Nina said she was "used to trouble!" Cruel, indeed, was the burden she had to bear!

One morning, just as a famous actor who was to play in the new piece had left Errington's study, the servant entered to say that "a person" wished to speak to Mr. Errington.

"What name?" asked the dramatist briefly.

"He wouldn't give any, sir. He said it was very particular business."

"Tell him he must send up his name. I can't just see anybody who chooses to come."

Like all prominent men, especially in his line, Errington might have spent his whole time listening to the tales of visitors, who were for the most part beggars or impostors; would-be dramatists, who wanted to read to him five act melodramas; actors who sought London engagements on the score of playing in third-rate provincial companies; ladies, young, old and middle-aged, who wanted "pecuniary assistance," and had heard that "Mr. Errington was so generous." These were only a few of the people who wrote to and called at Adelphi-terrace, but rarely succeeded in attaining the desired El Dorado—the presence of the dramatist.

The servant retired, and in a minute returned, with a rather large card, on which was printed, (not lithographed),—

"Mr. Jonas Barnett,

"Bill Discounter,

"53, — Lane, City."

Errington paused a moment, and drew his straight brows together; then he said,—

"Show the man up, Hipkins."

Something that was not definite enough for suspicion, and yet was a suggestion of suspicion, had come into Errington's mind when he saw that card.

Hipkins opened the door, and Errington turned to see the obsequiously bowing form of an elderly Jew, who held his hat in both hands, and wore a long great coat of a pattern which must be a Hebrew secret, since it is peculiar to the race of Abraham.

"Pray sit down, Mr. Barnett," said Errington, "and tell me your business as briefly as you can, please, as my time is valuable."

"Certainly, sir, certainly," said Mr. Barnett, seating himself on the edge of a chair, as if it were stuffed with porcupine quills. "I'm sorry, sir, to have to apply to you"—here he began fumbling in his capacious coat pocket—"but you see, sir, there's no help for it. You will remember this little transaction, sir, no doubt!"

Here he pulled out a document, and proceeded to unfold it.

Errington, as he listened, felt something like ice creeping through his veins. He put his hand on the chair near him, and gripped it tightly, but said not a word.

Mr. Barnett went on,—

"The drawer, you see, sir, has failed to meet the bill. I could not find him at his address, and so, sir, I must come to you, sir."

"Let me look at the bill," said Errington, quietly. He held out his hand.

Mr. Barnett gave him a keen glance, and resigned the document to him.

Errington looked and saw what he had expected. The bill—for two hundred pounds—was drawn by Godfrey Lovell on Jonas Barnett, and endorsed by Dudley Strange Errington—an excellent, but not perfect, imitation of the dramatist's signature.

He was not startled. It seemed, somehow, as if, the moment he knew his visitor's calling, that he had forecast all the rest. The truth was laid bare to him now, in all its nakedness. Godfrey Lovell a forger—Nina a fugitive for the crime not her own. He gave back the bill to the Jew.

"Come back to me," he said, briefly, "in three days. I cannot attend to this business now."

"It's quite formal, sir—quite formal," stammered Barnett.

Errington waved his hand impatiently.

"I have a right," he said, "to claim three days' grace. There is no more to be said."

"No! sir, no! I—"

Errington turned away, and the money-lender skulked out of the room.

Then Dudley Errington flung himself down by the table, and covered his face in a very tempest of agony.

"Nina! Nina!" he muttered, through the broken sobs that shook him like a reed. "Why did you not come to me? Why could you not trust me—my love, my love?"

But there was stern work to be done, and so he must master himself.

The bill should, of course, be met; but Godfrey must, if possible, be found—if still in England—and brought to terms.

He was in Dudley Errington's power now, and he would meet with scant mercy.

"He calculated, the dastard!" said Errington, "on my meeting the bill for Nina's sake. With the power that he has put into my hands I will crush him. It is a good thing, after all, for him that he has committed this crime!"

The next day appeared in all the morning papers the following advertisement:—

"G. L. will do well, for his own sake, to call on D. E. at once."

If Lovell was in England he was pretty certain

to see the advertisement. Would he accept the warning and come?

CHAPTER VIII.

HARD TERMS.

LURKING in a third-rate lodging-house, Godfrey Lovell saw that advertisement and had, of course, no doubt as to who it came from.

He had thought before of writing to Errington—even going to him—but he had not the moral courage for either of these proceedings; also, he solaced himself with the thought that Nina had written to her employer, telling him of the forgery.

The advertisement showed him that the first Errington knew of it was the presentation of the bill.

He did not for a moment imagine it was a trap.

"Ten to one he's spoons on Nina," thought he, "and that's first-rate for me, for then he'll do just anything for her. Shan't go before to-night, though."

In spite of his bravado, he was willing to put off the impending interview as long as he could. Put things what way you will, it isn't pleasant to come face to face with a man whose name you have forged.

It was between eight and nine in the evening when he repaired to Adelphi-terrace, and, the door being opened, asked jauntily for Mr. Errington.

"Mr. Errington's in, sir, but I don't know if he can see you. What name, please?"

"Just say a gentleman has called. It is an appointment."

The servant doubted this, but he departed to the study. He did not call this visitor a "person;" that servant knew a "person" from a "gentleman," and Godfrey was the latter in the *je ne sais quoi* which shows a man, whatever his vices, has been born of gentle blood. But there his gentility ceased.

"What is he like?" Errington asked.

"Young, sir; fair, well-dressed," was the reply.

"I think he is the man I expected. Show him up, Hipkins. So," he muttered, when alone, "you have been waiting for this, Godfrey Lovell! Heavens! that from one stock should come two such different creatures as Nina—and this—this vermin!"

He had walked with a quick, impatient step through the room. He paused by the fireplace as the door opened and the visitor came in. Yes, it was the man he had seen with Nina—Godfrey Lovell.

He had asked the Jew money-lender to be seated. He did not extend that courtesy to this man; and Godfrey, though he had meant to "brazen it out," found his eyes seeking the floor, and his "cheek" dwindling down when he saw the stern, set face of the man who knew him to be a criminal.

"I suppose," Errington began at once, not caring to banish from his manner the contempt he felt for the ineffectually mean creature before him, "you know that the bill to which you forged my endorsement has been presented to me, and it is on that account I sent for you?"

"Mr. Errington," began Godfrey, "I—"

"Make no excuses," interrupted the other, sternly. "I know pretty well what you are—an idle, worthless vagabond, not ashamed to live on the earnings for which your cousin worked day and night. You dared at last to commit this crime, because you thought it could be safely done—for your cousin's sake I would meet the bill. And so far you reckoned safely. But the money is not yet paid, nor will it be paid, except on my own terms!"

"I was desperate!" muttered Godfrey. "I did it in a frenzy!"

"Liar! as well as all else that is despicable," said Errington, with measureless scorn. "Spare me words, and simply listen to my terms; but

understand clearly the alternative of refusing them: That when the bill is again presented—the day after to-morrow—I shall declare the endorsement a forgery. If you can make good your escape between now and then you will be free to attempt it. I have not the least intention of paying this money and letting you go free to play the same trick over again, or commit some other crime which may bring disgrace on the name your cousin bears. My terms are these. I will give you two hundred pounds to leave this country for America or any of the colonies, the conditions being that you change your name, and that you never come back to this country, or write to your cousin on any pretext whatsoever. Do what you choose with your dastard life when it is once out of her way and mine. Only, take care not to return to England! I shall keep that forged bill, and, by Heaven, if you brave me I will put you in the felon's dock, Nina Lovell's kinsman though you be. The clock is on the stroke of nine; at ten minutes past nine give me your answer!"

Is there a lower depth to which man can sink than that to which Godfrey Lovell had sunk?

Perhaps some sense of his infinite degradation came to him when he was forced to feel the sting of the scorpion lash, and dared not retort or protest. And yet, after all, he thought the terms were better than he had expected.

Errington was certain to insist on his leaving England, and, perhaps, might have only offered him one instead of two hundred pounds. There was not much to think about—no need of ten minutes to decide where there was practically no choice.

Dudley Errington was not a man to be trifled with, and Godfrey did not find his position, as he stood there like a criminal—and a despised one at that—awaiting his sentence.

Scarcely three minutes had passed before he spoke.—

"You've got me in your power! So I must give in."

"You accept the terms?"

"Yes!"

"See!" said Errington, "that you hold to them!"

He went to his writing-table, and unlocked a drawer.

"Do you know," he added, "anything of your cousin's?"

"No; nothing! She told me she wouldn't come back here, and that's the last I knew of her."

Errington believed the answer, because it tallied with his own impression.

He took out a bundle of notes and counted them; and Godfrey, watching him, thought that he must have provided himself with the required amount, regarding the acceptance of the conditions as a foregone conclusion. Men don't generally—except on the stage—keep large sums of money in the house!

Errington rose, and handed the notes to the young man.

"Count them," he said, in the cold, contemptuous manner in which he had spoken all along; but Godfrey only said,—

"Thank you," stuffed the paper into his breast pocket, and opened the door.

Errington turned away without word or sign of adieu, and the door closed behind Godfrey Lovell.

For a long time after he was alone Errington sat with his head bowed down on his crossed arms, feeling mentally torn and lacerated by this contact with a creature, man in outward form, morally so hideous a travesty of mankind.

It was cruel pain to know that this despicable thing that "crawled between earth and Heaven" was so near to kin to Nina.

How her noble nature must have suffered in the constant companionship of that moral leprosy

How the very air must have seemed to her tainted with depravity!

The next day, when Mr. Jones Barnett presented himself, the bill was met, and the usurer departed rejoicing.

If he fancied there was something "odd" about the business it was no concern of his. His money was safe and sound, and his experience taught him that there were a good many more odd things in the world than it was worth his while to inquire into.

CHAPTER IX.

GOOD NEWS.

"*Mr. Errington* not at home?" said the detective. "Can you tell me when he will be?"

"Not till near twelve, perhaps. He has gone to the theatre."

"My business is most important! What theatre?"

"The Vaudeville."

"All right! Then I daresay I can get at him."

Mr. Brown departed.

It was now half-past eight. He went across to the Vaudeville, and asked at the box-office if they could tell him where Mr. Errington was—it was a matter of life and death!

The acting-manager referred to said he thought Mr. Errington was in the stalls; but he would go in front and see. It was a new piece to-night!

"Thanks!" said Brown, earnestly. "Please tell him to come out at once. Mr. Brown wants to see him!"

The manager vanished; and in three minutes Brown caught sight of Errington's tall figure.

He looked very white as he came up to the detective, and was evidently putting a curb on himself.

"What is it?" he said, quick and low. "Any news?"

"Yes, sir; good news!"

"This way."

Errington said a few words to the manager, and led the detective into a private room.

"Now," he said, shutting the door, "tell me."

"We've found the young lady, sir!"

"You are sure—quite sure?"

"I don't think there's a shadow of doubt, sir, it's the same! My agent in Manchester had the picture, and he succeeded in tracing Miss Lovell to this address." He drew out a paper, and gave it to Errington. "He found that she had been trying to get employment in a newspaper office, where she gave the name of Miss Calton. That tallies, sir; as Miss Lovell was used to work of that sort! It was a sub-editor they wanted; but they declined Miss Calton's application because they had only men in the office; and, they told my agent, Miss Calton was too young and handsome! There'd be bother among the editors on her account!"

"She hasn't any employment now, sir; but it's a nice, respectable woman who keeps the house, though it's a poor sort of place! My agent thought there was no need to ask questions at the house about her. She was so like the picture; and the colouring—hair and eyes and skin—all just what you had described. And he didn't want to run any chance of her getting to suspect anything."

"He did right! You don't know," Errington said, "what you have done for me!"

His voice trembled; but he recovered himself quickly.

"I will go down to Manchester to-night," he said. "I shall arrive in the early morning; and no time will be wasted."

"My agent is keeping watch on the house, sir. So Miss Lovell can't escape us now!"

They parted; and Errington returned at once to Adelphi-terrace, gave some necessary orders, left messages for two or three people who were to call the next day, and drove off in time to catch a late train from Euston.

He reached Manchester in the early morning, and, going to an hotel, waited with what patience he might.

Sleep was out of the question till he could go to the address given him by the detective.

Hope lifted, doubt depressed, he paced the floor of his room! What if, after all, the detectives should have followed the wrong woman? And the result of his visit would be the sickening disappointment of seeing a strange face! Reason told him these doubts were but self-torture.

Was there likely to be at this time another woman of Nina Lovell's stamp living in hiding in a mill-worker's house? But the very intensity of our desires makes us fearful, because we hope and long so much! We recoil, in the sheer terror of disappointment, upon doubts and questionings!

How should he meet her?

They had parted as lovers! Could he meet her as only a "true and loyal friend?" Could he, in her actual presence, master his passion, even when now, in the anticipation, his heart throbbed to suffocation, his brain grew dizzy?

It was useless to plan, to think! He must trust to the moment. And, if he failed, surely Nina would forgive.

He waited till nine o'clock—the part of Manchester he sought was in the very heart of the city—and then he ordered a cab, and drove away, telling the cabman to set him down two or three streets away from the street he wanted. He was more likely to find Nina at home at this time than later, and his impatience would brook no delay that was not absolutely necessary.

After dismissing the cab he inquired for — street, and easily discovered it.

The door at No. 12 stood a little open, and a young woman with a baby in her arms was on the step, and stared with all her might at the handsome, well-dressed stranger, who, to add to her amazement, stopped before her, and, raising his hat, asked if "Miss Calton was at home?"

"Mebbe," she replied. "Aunt's at t' mill. Yo' can go an' see!"

"Thanks. Which room is it?"

"First floor at t' back. Happ'n yo' knew her?" added the young woman, with a glimmer of doubt.

"She is a friend of mine."

The girl nodded, signifying "All right."

And Errington went through the passage, up the narrow stairs, and, not allowing himself to hesitate, knocked at the door of the back room.

"Come in!" said a sweet voice from within. It was Nina's voice.

Then, for a minute, he paused. All doubted—he was certainty—the desire had come! And the strong man shook like an aspen leaf, and pressed his hand over his throbbing heart.

Then he opened the door gently, and stood within the room.

CHAPTER X.

I LOVE YOU.

He had just a vision of a dark-robed, slender figure standing by the window in a drooping attitude, its back towards him; but at the closing of the door it turned; and then, with a stifled cry, Nina was at his feet, cowering down like a guilty creature.

"Loyal friend!" Ay, but in that supreme moment could the man who loved her be master of himself—could he even make the effort?

He bent down and raised up the bowed form that half shrank from him, half yielded, and gathered it within his arms, in clasp so close that even its very quivering seemed stilled. Only he

felt the wild beating of the young heart against his own that gave back such passionate throbs; only he knew she was his own restored to him again—that heaven alone could rob him of her now. And she, clinging to him hiding her face on his breast, yet while she clung, half shrank from him, as if struggling between contrary passions.

"Dearest!" Errington whispered at last—it was long before he could speak—and tenderly his lips pressed the bright curls, "you must not shrink from me. There is no shame to you. I know everything. That misery will never cloud your life again."

"No shame!" she said, and suddenly burst into terrible weeping, sobbing with a convulsive violence that for some little time Errington was powerless to soothe.

"My darling!" he said, "my darling—not such tears! You break my heart. Nina, I cannot see you weep so!"

But even then it was two or three minutes before she could falter brokenly,—

"Forgive me—oh! forgive me! I have made you suffer so much! Oh! why did we ever meet!"

The words sent a pang of dread to the man's heart. For a moment he held his breath; the next he bent over her, and put his to the soft cheek wet with tears.

"You don't mean that, dearest!" he said. "You cannot mean it!"

"Only for your sake!" she said, flushing and trembling.

He did not answer that. For a moment he strained her closer to him. Then he drew her to a chair, and would have placed her in it, releasing her; but she motioned him to sit down, and, half kneeling, half sitting at his feet, leaped her head down on his knee with a kind of mute penitence.

There was a strange self-abnegation in the act, as if she had begun to feel—that first delirium past—that she had in some way wronged him, and was scarcely worthy yet to be taken to his heart.

And Errington humoured her, for he did not quite understand; and his heart failed him with the miserable fear that she did not love him as he desired, and so shrank from seeming to deceive him by yielding him the lover's right to hold her to his heart. He must remember, then, his promise. He must be loyal and true, though the blood leapt like fire in his veins, lover no more—unless she should choose it so—but friend, who would help her without hope or thought of reward.

Tenderly he laid his hand on the bended head.

"Nina!" he said softly, the quietness of self-suppression in his voice, "Godfrey has left England. The man, Barnett came to me with the bill. I was not surprised. I suspected that this man—you remember I saw him with you once—had something to do with your leaving me. No! Never think, Nina, that in all that cruel time, I for one instant doubted you. Whatever the sin that made you suffer, it was none of your own."

"You are very good to me!" she said, under her breath.

Errington had to pause for a moment before he could go on. It seemed as if a touch, a look, might sweep away his self-control as if it were a thing of gossamer.

"I sent for Godfrey," he went on, after that brief struggle, "and told him on what terms I would meet the bill. I had discovered before this what kind of a man he was—that he idled away his worthless life, and made you keep him. I had no pity—could have no pity—for such a man. I gave him two hundred pounds to leave the country for some colony, where he was to live under another name, never returning to this country, or even writing to you. I told him that if he broke the bargain I would not spare him. He

accepted the terms; he had no choice. So that sorrowful page in your life is closed, dear one—for ever!"

She did not answer. She had no words. Her tears were falling thick and fast again. She drew his hand to her lips, and kissed it gratefully. He answered the action, as if she had spoken.

"Did I not promise," he said, very low, "to do all that lay in my power for you—as a true and loyal friend? I only kept that promise, Nina. But you—oh! child," he said, hoarsely; "why did you not come to me? Could you not trust me?"

The girl shrank from his touch, crouching lower.

"I trusted you to the uttermost!" she said, "but I could not come—I could not. Did you know—bear with me a little—that Godfrey, at first, wanted me to borrow of you?"

"Was that after you made me that promise, Nina, to come to me if you were in any trouble?"

"No; but it was after the first time you said you would help me if I needed it."

"You did not think, then that I meant it?"

"Oh! yes—yes!" she said, in passionate distress; "but how could I ask such a thing of you? It would be a sin, that he should have money to squander in vice, and that I should ask it of you, who had been so kind to me. I had no claim on you!"

"You had a claim when I gave it to you, dear! But when you knew about the bill, that night—you had promised me then—you knew that I would give even my life to save you from any pain—disgrace to your name would be a sword in my own soul—and yet you would not come to me; you fled from me! I might—knowing nothing—have denied my signature, and so unwittingly have brought shame upon you. Tell me the truth, Nina—however deeply it may wound—hardly acknowledged to your own heart in its most secret thoughts—you did not trust me?"

She raised herself a little, bowing her face down on her clasped hands resting on his knee.

"I couldn't come to you," she whispered brokenly. "I couldn't—I let me try and tell you. It was that day—when—when—"

"When I told you," he said, softly and steadily, seeing that she needed help, "that I loved you!"

"Yes—and I asked for time—I did not know—and I thought of Godfrey—I never trusted him—he might bring shame upon you——"

"Go on, dearest!"

"And one night—Godfrey told me—about the forgery—and—wanted me to go to you—and I had promised. But, oh!" she cried, suddenly, and lifting herself she clasped her arms about his neck, and hid her burning face on his breast, "don't you understand why it was I couldn't go to you?"

Once more she was folded to her lover's heart, and even the rapture of the first moments of reunion was as nothing to the glory of these—when he knew "past all unknowing," that his darling was his own indeed—he, even when she knew it not herself. It was her lips that sought his now, and Nina shrank no more, but yielded herself wholly to his clinging kisses.

"Forgive my foolish fears!" Errington said at last, only loosing his clasp a little that he might gaze his fill into the dear face, "that dulled my brain. My very hope made me fearful. Tell me you love me, Nina! You have told me, I know, in all but words—but I want to hear you say the words."

The girl laid her flushed cheek to his. "I love you!" she whispered, tremulously. "I love you!"

And then once more there was a long, sweet silence, which neither of them cared to break. Is not this the silence that is more eloquent than thousand tongues of gold?

CHAPTER XI. ERRINGTON'S WIFE.

It was Errington who spoke first, asking Nina about her life since she left London. There was not much to tell. She had had money enough to more than suffice her, up to the present time. She had failed in getting any employment; and then she would learn how it was that Errington had found her, and nearly broke down again, thinking of his suffering.

"I knew you would seek me," she said. "Oh! I did wrong; but I seemed to be nearly mad when I left London, and I was so afraid to meet you. You would make me tell you the truth, and break down all opposition; and yet any day Godfrey might commit some such crime as this, and bring disgrace upon your name. I could not bear that."

"I would have made you my wife, Nina," he answered, "though the world had rung with that dastard's name. And all my suffering seems as nothing now that I have found you, and for all that you have suffered in the past years—in these unhappy weeks—my love shall do its utmost to make atonement."

"It will be more than atonement," she said, softly. "Oh! I am so happy—so strangely happy; and I know that I shall be so always, for whatever happens nothing can take away your love from me."

Errington kissed her tenderly in silence.

"Sweetheart," he said, after a pause, "are you quite alone in the world?"

"Quite," she said. "I have distant relations, but they are rich, and we were always poor. We never saw them, and they, I daresay, hardly know that I am living."

"Then, my darling, you must let me take care of you at once. Does it sound strange to you?" smiling, as she hid her face against him—"to be taken care of? Well, you will not mind a lover's chains, will you? There is no need for delay, is there, dearest?"

"No," she answered, trembling a little.

He strained her closer to him.

"Let me take you back to London as my wife, darling! I wish it could be otherwise—for your sake; but since you have no home or friends, is it not better so? And for my own sake—well, I don't care how soon you come to me."

"I will do whatever you wish," said Nina, meekly.

"The day after to-morrow, sweetheart?"

"If you wish it."

"My darling—thanks!"

"There will be arrears of work for me to do," said Nina, by-and-by. "You don't know how miserable that made me feel—though it was so small compared with the rest—that I left the work undone."

"But I am not going to let you be a slave, sweetheart!"

"It wasn't slavery!" she said, eagerly; "and now it will be sweeter than ever to work for you."

"My darling! And you need not be banished. It was so hard to restrict myself to only coming to your room when it was necessary, and going out when the business I came about was over."

"You might have stayed," said Nina. "I should not have thought anything of it."

"But you must have got to suspect at last, after all, dear, that I was beginning to think a good deal about you?"

"Yes," she said, hiding her face again. "I did—in a vague way—but not clearly."

"The wonder would be if I didn't, Nina! Did ever man have such a dangerously charming secretary?"

"I don't know. I am sure no secretary ever had such an employer as I had!"

It was a strangely quiet marriage for a man who lived in the glare of the world!

Nina and her future husband met in the church, in the early morning. It was scarcely nine o'clock, and there was no one present but a couple of Sisters praying in the nave, the verger, and one of the clergy, who gave Nina away.

The priest who married them knew the dramatist's name—no educated man could be ignorant of it—and perhaps wondered why he was being married in this obscure way. It almost looked like a runaway match, but certainly he had chosen a bride who had wits as well as beauty.

A thrill of amazement ran through society, artistic and general, when in the morning papers it read that "Mr. Dudley Errington, the dramatist, was married yesterday morning at St. Alban's, Manchester, to Miss Nina Lovell, daughter of the late Mr. Charles Lovell, of Brickleby, Devon."

"Who the dickens is she? How dark Errington kent!" said some.

"By Jove!" said others, "it's that awfully pretty girl who was with him at the matinee—you remember?"

And so the talk went round, and not a few fair ones felt that they could never forgive the handsome dramatist for not having thrown the handkerchief to one of them.

Errington brought his young wife up to Adelphi-terrace for a few days while he arranged matters, so that he could leave London for awhile, and then he took her abroad for a month.

Dudley Errington's beautiful wife, once the obscure dweller of a Camden Town lodging, is one of the most popular women in London.

But popularity has not spoiled her, and she still works as her husband's secretary, and is still happiest—and ever will be—by his side; and as she said, and says again, if troubles come once more to blur the sunshine of her life, they can never rob her of happiness—for that is rooted in a love which cannot fail!

[THE END.]

GIVE HIM BACK TO ME.

—:o:—

CHAPTER XLVIII.

DRIVEN TO DESPERATION.

It was the day before Lady Jane's wedding. Mr. Lumpington had suddenly found it necessary to proceed at once to Jamaica, where he owned some sugar plantation, some frauds having been committed by his manager.

As in duty bound, he had placed himself entirely at his bride's disposal, giving her the option of being married almost at a day's notice, or waiting till he came back. To his surprise Lady Jane smiled sweetly upon him, and declared her intention of accompanying him on his voyage.

He acquiesced, and said something courteous to the effect of being delighted; but, in reality his heart misgave him. Though the aristocrats might laugh at him because he was not of noble birth, he was a thorough gentleman in feeling, and he was careful not to let Lady Jane see that he was no longer so proud of the alliance.

He took it for granted that the reports about her flirtation with a Mr. Sartoris had been exaggerated; but from certain signs about the brother and sister he felt sure that some calamity was about to fall on the house of Armitage.

He consoled himself, however, with the thought that he and his bride would be well out of the way in the West Indies.

Lady Jane was sitting in her own boudoir, deep in thought, with a letter on her knee, whilst her eyes were bent on the fire. Round

the room there were many tokens of the coming event.

"The latest novelty from Paris," in the shape of a wonderful grey velvet bonnet peeped out of a half-open box; several dozens of long-buttoned Suedes lay upon a miniature table, wrapped in silver paper; a packet of photographs was half hidden by a pile of opened letters; a huge wreath of roses, evidently fresh from Regent street, lay unheeded on a sofa; a veil of priceless lace was draped over the back of a chair.

Lady Jane looked up eagerly as her brother came in, for she had not seen him since the day when she had questioned him about Jack Sartoris.

"I suddenly remembered I hadn't given you anything," he said with a slight smile, so I went into Howell and James's, and bought the first thing I saw. Women like to look at themselves, I know," placing a very pretty little mirror with a Byzantine frame on the top of the gloves.

"Oh! take care, it will fall! How lovely! Just the very thing to stand on my pet table. Dear Ralph, how good of you!"

She held up her face to be kissed, and he bent gravely over her till his lips touched her forehead. As he stooped his eye fell on the letter.

"What is Miss Forrester writing to you about?" he asked with affected carelessness, though his interest was immediately excited by the sight of the Taunton post-mark.

"First she says she is going to send me a pair of candlesticks. It seems as if people fancied I was setting up a fancy-shop; and then she goes on:

"And now I must tell you the most extraordinary thing. As I was riding home after a capital run, with old Thomas behind me, I saw a number of men with ropes and all sorts of things down by the Crannock, close to the bridge. I asked the head man what they were doing, but he wouldn't tell me anything; so I tried a sub. a little further on, and he told me—under the influence of a half-crown—that they were dragging the river for a body. It made my hair stand on end, but I went on pumping."

"Whose body?" I asked, feeling all of a shiver; where do you think he said?

"Some say it's Mr. Sairtris what lived 'oop at the Court,' with a jerk of the thumb towards Fardon; 'but others will have it that it's the gen'iman what stayed with her leddyship down at the Bank.'

"Mr. St. John, do you mean?" I asked, as the name popped into my head goodness knows why.

"Ay! that be the very one; but we haven't found 'ere a one of 'em."

"Now, my dear Jane, what do you think of that? Doesn't it make you stare? How could your poor friend, Mr. Sartoris, pick himself out of that French lake, where he's been resting for a whole year, and remove himself into the Crannock? Or, on the other hand, if it's Mr. St. John they are looking for, why do they think he is there? And if they do think so, why didn't they look for him before? Do send me a line if you poss—" "Ralph, what's the matter?" breaking off suddenly, as her brother started up from his chair.

He scarcely seemed to know where he was going, for he walked right up against the little table, and the next instant sent the pretty looking-glass with a crash on to the floor.

"Oh, dear! you've broken it!" she cried in dismay, "and it was so lovely!"

He went down upon his knees and scrambled up the pieces, as if his haste could help to mend them.

"Take care, you'll cut yourself. I'll ring for them to sweep it up—it is quite done for; but what's that?" with almost a scream, as her eye fell on a red stream running along the carpet.

"Only a bit of glass ran into my wrist. It's nothing. Now don't make a fuss!"

But it was time to make a fuss, for as he was feeling for his handkerchief he fell sideways on the floor, and his eyes closed. With a cry of horror, Lady Jane sprang with one bound to the bell and rang a peal, then seized hold of an Albanian antimacassar, and shaking all over at the sight of the blood, tied it as tightly as she could over her brother's wrist. Having done that to the best of her ability, which was not great, she rang again and again, till she had fetched the Countess up from the drawing-room, and every servant except the cook, from upstairs as well as down.

The patient was the only person in the room who had ever attended any ambulance lectures, and he was unfortunately past giving advice, so they stood round him in a frightened crowd—dreadfully alarmed at the way in which the blood was soaking through the bandage, but not having an idea how to make a tourniquet and stop it.

Lady Oldthorpe, unused to violent emotion of any kind, collapsed, and sank upon a chair; whilst Lady Jane, with more presence of mind, sent one of the maids downstairs to fetch some ice, whilst a footman was told to get into the first hansom he could find, and fetch a doctor.

It was a strange scene; the poor mother in her handsome velvet dress sitting all crunched up together in a large arm-chair, her face hidden in her hands; Lady Jane on the floor, with her brother's head on her knees, and an expression of wild anxiety in her restless eyes and parted lips; the group of servants at the door, the bridal finery scattered about, the jewelled frame of the broken mirror, and the delicate wreath of roses crushed under some hasty foot.

A long interval elapsed before the patient could be safely moved and put to bed. When Dr. Moseley had bandaged his wrist securely, and the first dreadful anxiety was over, then the maids began to murmur about the ill-luck of the broken glass; but this was almost forgotten in their subsequent dismay when it was discovered that the wedding veil had a crimson stain.

"There will be no wedding to-morrow," said one oracularly.

"One or other of the wedded pair is bound to be dead before the year is out," remarked a second.

"Well, I must see what I can do with it," said the lady's maid, picking it up in a heap, "but blood always leaves a stain. You'll never get it out of that carpet. mark my words," to a housemaid who was scrubbing it as hard as she could, "and the presents will have to be put in another room. There's my lady's bell; I must go."

"Your brother must not move on any account," those were the last instructions given by the doctor, so Lady Jane was considerably startled when she went into the patient's room with the mixture which had just been sent, and was met by the question,—

"What on earth have they put me here for? I must get up at once."

"You mustn't think of such a thing!" said Lady Jane, decidedly. "You are to take this," pouring out a dose, "and get some sleep if you can."

"Sleep! I won't take it. I must have my wits about me. Get me some brandy, there's a good girl. I don't feel as if I had the strength of a rat," trying to sit up, but sinking helplessly back on the pillows.

"No; you mustn't have it in your present state. It might bring on brain-fever; the doctor says so."

"The doctor be hanged, Jane!" his voice husky and so weak she could hardly hear it. "You'll be sorry all your life if you keep me here."

"It would kill you to move. You couldn't

even get across the room," her own knees knocking together with the fear that was upon her.

"Is there anyone in the room?" looking round with haggard eyes.

"Not a soul."

"Then listen. Bend down close; there's a plot against me. Mayne and Landon and Violet, they are all in it. If I stay, I shall be arrested!"

"Good heavens! I don't understand—a plot?"

"Yes, I must get away. It's a matter of life and death. Help me, there's a good girl."

"Couldn't Violet stop it?" feeling utterly bewildered.

"Violet!" with a sound that would have been a laugh if he had had sufficient strength to bring it forth. "She hates me! She would move Heaven and earth to get me out of her way!"

"But she has a kind heart. She wouldn't willingly do harm to a creature."

"Brandy—brandy?" he gasped, pointing to a black bottle on the table by the side of the bed. "Jane, do you want to be the ruin of me?"

She took up the uncorked bottle hesitatingly. What if her brother's words were true, and it was absolutely necessary for him to get away? Whilst she hesitated, with the strength given by something very like despair, he snatched the bottle from her hand, and putting it to his lips, drank a copious draught with feverish eagerness. She snatched it from him in a fright, but the mischief was already done—the spirit flew to his feeble brain. He sank back on the pillows exhausted with the effort, but only for a few minutes. Presently he began talking wildly:

"You can't say I did it—the bank was steep—he rolled down into the darkness—it was black as night—St. John—Sartoris—which was it? Oh! Heaven! Be quick—be quick—no one knows—Violet! Violet!"

The voice died away in a moan, whilst Lady Jane stood leaning against the table, her whole soul absorbed in listening. For a moment the nameless fear that had possessed her took the concrete form of "murder," and her heart turned sick with terror.

The next instant she cast the thought from her, her soul rising up in indignant protest for her brother. He could not have done such an act, but suspicion might have been cast upon him by the hatred of others, or by his own folly. He was in France, she knew, at the time of Jack Sartoris's death, though his friends believed him to be shooting in Warwickshire, and he might have even seen him die, and not been able to stop him—or *perha's not wished to*—that must be the extent of his guilt.

What could she do? If he lay there under the constant terror of the arrival of the police it would be enough to turn his brain. As she thought it, a desperate resolution came into her head, and she resolved to carry it out. Whilst her mother was dressing for dinner, a hired nurse taking care of the invalid, alone, and in the pitchy darkness of a winter's evening, Lady Jane was hurrying as fast as the train could take her to Leighton!

(To be continued.)

"THEN you don't bank much on ancestral pride?" "No; it is more to a man's credit to start from nowhere and be somebody than to start from somewhere and be nobody."

HE: "Does your wife—er—ever compare you to her first husband?" HIM: "Yep. When she gets right mad at me she says I am almost as mean as he was."

HE: "Why so quiet, dear? I haven't heard you open your mouth hardly once to-day." SHE: "O I'm saving myself for the whist party to-night."

FACETIA.

WIFE (after a quarrel): "I wish I'd never met you!" **Husband**: "Yes. Now when it's too late you are sorry for me!"

"No matter how drunk I get I can always tell what I'm doing." "What were you doing last night?" "I was doing the town."

JOHNSON: "That man Williams never lost his head in a football game yet, did he?" **Thompson**: "No; I think not. He lost an ear, part of his nose and some teeth. But I think that's all."

WIFE: "My dear, you haven't a cold have you?" **Husband**: "No." "Any headache?" "Rheumatism?" "Not a particle." "You don't think it will rain, do you?" "No danger, why?" "This is Sunday and it is almost church time."

"ALARM clocks are no good." "Why do you say so?" "I was carrying one under my arm when that thief stole my pocketbook."

"SHE married a millionaire, didn't she?" "You mean that he was a millionaire at the time she married him."

MILLY: "But how do you know she is married? Did you see her wedding ring?" **Flossie**: "Oh, no; I just mentioned the word 'cook,'" and her eyes lit up in a minute, and I knew."

PROCEEDING WITH CAUTION.—"Do you subscribe to this statement that a woman ought to look up to her husband?" enquired Mr. Meekton's wife. "Well, Henrietta," he answered cautiously, "I do think that when there is any picture-hanging or anything like that going on in the house it's a man's duty to assume the position of perilous responsibility at the top of the stepladder."

SHE TAMED HER HUSBAND.—I daresay there isn't a woman on earth who hasn't a theory on the subject of how to manage a husband, and I have never yet come across a man who was any the worse for a little scientific handling now and then. If I were in the florist business I'd send a palm to a certain M.P.'s daughter, who has set an example managing wives might follow with profit. She has a husband, this M.P.'s daughter, who is supposed to be critical. Most of his friends are men of great wealth, who live extremely well, and association with them has made him somewhat hard to please in the matter of cooking. For some time the tendency has been growing on him. Scarcely a meal at his own table passed without criticism from him. "What is this meant for?" he would ask, after tasting an *entreé* his wife had racked her brain to think up. "What on earth is this?" he would say when dessert came on. "Is this supposed to be a salad?" he would inquire sarcastically, when the lettuce was served. The wife stood it as long as she could. One evening he came home in a particularly captious humour. His wife was dressed in her most becoming gown, and fairly bubbled over with wit. They went to dinner. The soup tureen was brought in. Tied to one handle was a card, and on that card the information in a big, round hand:—"This is soup." Roast beef followed, with a placard announcing:—"This is roast beef." The potatoes were labelled. The gravy-dish was placarded. The tomatoes bore a card marked "Tomatoes," the salad-bowl carried a tag marked "Salad," and when the ice pudding came in a card announcing "This is ice pudding," came with it. The wife talked of a thousand different things all through the meal, never once referring by word or look to the labelled dishes. Neither then nor thereafter did she say a word about them, and never since that evening has the captious husband ventured to inquire what anything set before him is.

"You used to say," suggested her dearest friend, "that he was one in a thousand." "I still think so," answered the girl whose engagement had been broken, "but I have discovered that he is not the only one in a thousand."

MRS. SELDOM-HOLME: "Yes, it's frightful to see how bold the theives and burglars have become. I understand your husband is mourning the loss of a fine gold watch some fellow stole from him yesterday." **Mrs. Gofrequent**: "No, he hasn't reached the mourning stage yet. He's still swearing."

SERVANT: "Yis, sorr, Mrs. Bounce is in. What's your name, sorr?" **Visitor**: "Professor Vandersplinkenheimer." **Servant**: "Och! Sure ye'd better go roight in and take it wid ye."

PARODOXICAL.—"Thrift is essential to happiness." "Here, you've got the thing twisted around. A man has to be financially miserable before he begins to think of saving money."

"DEAR me, that was terrible. Man fell overboard in mid-ocean the other day, and never was seen again," said Hicks. "Drowned?" asked Mrs. Hicks, hysterically. "Oh, no! of course not," said Hicks, irritably. "Sprained his ankle, probably!"

A NEIGHBOURLY QUARREL.—**Mrs. Murphy**: Your face would scare a blind man. **Mrs. Brown**: An' yours would be an improvement if I trowed a pail of acid on it, it's that ugly.

A RATHER stout passenger stepped from a train at a small station in Scotland. He was a stranger to the village, and the only passenger to alight there. After walking the whole length of the poorly-lighted platform he failed to discover the way out. Not even a porter could be found, and the gentleman was almost in despair, when he noticed a ragged little urchin peeping through the railings, evidently vastly interested in the stranger's appearance. "I can't get out of this confounded station of yours," said the traveller. "Can you show me the proper way?" The lad critically surveyed his questioner, moved away a yard or two, and asked, with a grin,—"Have you tried sideways?"

HE: "Yes, she does look lovely! Is she brainy? A woman of mind?" **She**: "Brainy! She's far too knowing for that!"

THE WASH MAN HAS COME.—A new field of usefulness has been discovered for the superfluous man, and a Philadelphia woman vouches for the discovery. Her bell rang on Monday morning and the coloured maid announced that "De wash man hab cum."

"The washman? You mean washerwoman, don't you?" exclaimed her mistress.

"No'm; it's de washman now," said Liza. "De lady wot uther do de washin' is a frien' ob mine, an' Ah done got 'er a stiddy job las' week workin' in a fambly on Locust-street."

"Well, twen, who's to do my wash?" demanded Liza a mistress.

"Why, de washman. He's done yere now," said Liza. "He's de husban' of my lady frien' wot used to do de washin'. He's a no' count niggah, an' now she's got a stiddy job he's gwine to do her washin' fer his bo'd!"

HOW SO?—"Tom," said a father to his son, whose school report showed him to have been an idle young scamp, what have you been studying this term?" "Logic, father," replied Tom, "I can prove that you are not here now." "Indeed! How so?" "Well, you must be either at Rome or elsewhere?" "Certainly." "You are not at Rome?" "No." "Then you must be elsewhere." "Just so." "And if you are elsewhere, you clearly can't be here?" For answer the father took up a cane that lay near, and laid it smartly across his son's back. "Don't!" cried Tom. "You are hurting me." "Not at all. You have just proved conclusively that I am not here, so I can't be hurting you." Before his stern parent had quite done with him, Tom felt that there must be after all, a flaw somewhere in his logic.

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"Miss Jimp, how did you make such an impression on that shy Mr. Diggs?" "I acted shyer than he did."

BRIGGS: "So the passengers in the car discovered that Claude and his wife were newly married in spite of the efforts of both of them to keep dark?" **Griggs**: "Yes, but it was his fault. He spoke to her several times during the trip."

BREAKING THE NEWS GENTLY.—There is a man in Liverpool who is renowned for his imperturbable calmness on every imaginable occasion. One day he strolled leisurely into the office of a friend. "I have just had a chat with your wife," he said, by way of beginning. "Why, I didn't know she was in town?" "Oh, she wasn't in town," replied the other. "I called at your house." "I didn't know she was receiving to-day," said the husband, with some surprise. "I thought she had a headache." "She didn't mention it to me," said the calm man. "There was a crowd at the house." "A crowd!" echoed the husband. "Yes," went on the calm man. "They came with the fire engine." "The fire engine," gasped the husband. "Oh, it's all right now," went on the calm man. "It's all out now. It wasn't much of a fire, but I thought you'd like to know it."

SOCIETY.

THERE is a rumour that by the terms of Queen Victoria's will no money has been left to the King, only Balmoral; and that Osborne is left to Princess Henry of Battenberg, the bulk of the money going to Princess Christian, Princess Henry of Battenberg, and the Duke of Connaught.

It is thought unlikely in Court circles that the King will make his eldest daughter Princess Royal for two reasons. First, because his sister, the Empress Frederic, is Princess Royal, and no instance has been known of the title being duplicated; while it is well known that the Duchess of Fife loves best a quiet and domestic life, and having married a subject she may be considered disqualified for the position.

THE late Queen Victoria some years before her death with her own hand wrote out all the directions for her funeral. She expressed a wish to be covered with a white pall; she even chose some favourite hymns; and said that she would be followed by no hearse or mourning coaches; but desired to be buried as the head of the British Army, which she loved so well. She further specified that she was to be drawn on a gun-carriage; and mentioned, too, that she had often noticed that they jolted a great deal, and hoped that by the time she died something would have been invented to make them go more smoothly, which accounts for a gun-carriage having been specially made with rubber tyres. All her arrangements pointed to the fact, that she thought to die at Windsor. She did not wish to have any lying-in-state, or publicity, but wanted to be laid in St. George's Chapel till the funeral, and then go quietly to Frogmore.

Now that Edward VII. is installed in the stately home of his forefathers all the world must feel that his reign has indeed begun. Royal Windsor is endeared to the King and his Consort by many pleasant memories and hallowed associations, and sad in many ways as his homecoming must be, he would be more than human could he repress the thrill of pride when that storied mass of noble buildings rises before his sight. It is more than probable that the Court will spend most of the year at Windsor. Fond as their Majesties are of Sandringham, its accommodation is hardly sufficient to meet the demands of the pomp and circumstance that will characterise the new Court.

QUEEN WILHELMINA's wedding gown was designed in Paris, and its chief feature consists of wonderful embroideries. The dress itself is of cloth of silver so exquisitely supple and fine in texture that it suggests the Indian muslin of our grandmothers, which could be pulled through a ring. It is made up over the richest white guace silk. The front of jupon, is worked in a tapering design harmonizing with the train, being broad at the hem and narrowing toward the waist. The full court-train trails two and a half metres on the ground. It falls from the waist and is surrounded by two broad bands of embroidery, giving the general idea of detached sprays of orange-blossoms and their foliage connected by scrolls and ribbons. Each one of the clusters of flowers has a single, fully opened bloom, surrounded by buds more or less developed. Fine seed-pears are used for these, while the foliage is indicated by silver threads and paillettes. In addition to the pearls and paillettes, six kinds of silver-bullion twist are employed to produce the different effects required, and most of the interlacing ribbon is highly raised, or, in technical terms, "couched." The embroidery is worked up on silver tissue and white silk foundation as well, thus imparting richness as well as firmness. No work appears on the bodice, which, according to Dutch custom for state weddings, is cut low.

STATISTICS.

THE size of the ark mentioned in Script ure was 540 feet long, 90 feet beam and 54 feet depth.

In the adult human body there are, inclusive of thirty-two teeth, some 249 separate bones.

THE heart of an adult man is about the size of his closed fist, some 5 in. long by 3½ in. maximum breadth and 2½ in. thick. It varies in weight from 10 to 12 ozs. in the male, from 8 to 10 ozs. in the female.

THE temperature of the adult human body averages 98 deg. F. or a little more.

GEMS.

RELIGION may be tested by many virtues, but it may be safely said that its surest proof is kindness.

If every one did an act of kindness to his neighbour, and refused to do any unkindness, half the sorrows of this world would be lifted and disappear.

WHAT we mean to do let us do quickly, for life is short, and we shall not pass this way again.

WOMEN who create around them a quiet and genial atmosphere will never want for grateful subjects.

Do not let want of success depress you, but struggle on. Labour hard continuously, and you will win in the end.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

PUMPKIN PUDDING.—Pare half a large pumpkin and cut it in slices; boil until quite soft; drain from the water and beat very fine; add to it one pint of milk, two ounces of powdered sugar, the peel of a small lemon, grated, two ounces of currants, washed and picked, and three eggs, well beaten. Beat the whole together for a few minutes, pour the mixture into a dish, and bake in a moderate oven.

VERMICELLI AND CHEESE PATTIES.—Break vermicelli into small pieces and boil in salted water until tender. Make a cream dressing of two tablespoonsfuls of butter, one teaspoonful of flour, one cup of cream and one-half teaspoonful of salt. Put in patty shells a layer of vermicelli, then a layer of the cream dressing and grate some cheese on top. Bake brown.

SUET is preferred by many housekeepers to lard for cooking purposes, and an excellent way to prepare it is the following:—Cut up the suet, discarding all blood and pieces of skin, and soak over night in cold water. Put in an iron kettle or dripping-pan and add a half cup of sweet milk for each pound. Cook slowly until the suet is a golden brown, being careful not to let it burn. Strain it into jars or basins. It will keep better than lard, and may be used for all kinds of shortening or frying, either alone or with lard or butter. When hard it may be scraped fine. It is far more wholesome than lard, and has none of the suety taste so disagreeable to many people.

A FRENCH METHOD OF COOKING HADDOCK.—Skin and fillet a fresh haddock. Butter a fire-proof dish plentifully, place one of the fillets in the tin, mix four ounces of breadcrumbs with a tablespoonful of chopped parsley, and some pepper and salt. Cover the fillet with a layer of the crumbs, then the second fillet, and spread the rest of the crumbs on top. Place bits of butter all over and bake in a moderate oven for half to three-quarters of an hour. This is a simple yet delicious method of cooking haddocks.

MISCELLANEOUS.

COIN LANGUAGE.—Every country possesses slang terms for money. The United States has its "green backs" and "nickels." In Scotland the man who flies "kites" is probably not worth a "boodle," which is a purely imaginary coin. Here in England the same person would not be worth a "mag." A "kite" is an accommodation bill, and a "mag" is a farthing. Great Britain is full of money slang. On the race-course, where slang of all sorts abounds, one hears talk of betting a "pony," which is twenty-five pounds, or a "monkey" which is five hundred pounds. A "quid" refers to tobacco, when used by sailors; among landsmen it means one pound. Small gamblers play for "bulls" and "half bulls," which mean crowns and half-crowns. The cab-driver expects you to tip him with a "tanner"—that is, a sixpence—while the common appellation of a shilling is a "bob." From these examples it will be seen that we have a long way to go before we catch up to England in slang.

EXCLUDED FROM THE HOUSE.—It is well-known that women are excluded from the House of Commons, but the reason for it is not so generally known. The fact is that the regulations which deal with this subject arose out of the misconduct of the women themselves. Formerly they were admitted to all parts of both houses wherever there was room to be found. In 1779, however, during an interesting debate, the speaker made an order that all strangers should withdraw. The House was overflowing with women at the time, and a ridiculous scene ensued because they unanimously refused to go, resisted, fought, and protested loudly when the attendants tried to make them. They had to be turned out one by one, and as this had to be done with as little violence as possible, the affair took four hours to effect, during the whole of which time there was such a noise of voices and rustling of dresses that the business of the House had to be suspended till the women were gone. To avoid a repetition of this scene the Commons passed an order excluding feminine visitors from the actual body of the House.

MME. PATTI, who recently attained her fifty-seventh birthday, has for many years held the record for the largest sum earned in the year by a woman. Her highest total for twelve months is close upon £70,000. Her present London concert terms are said to be £400 a night, but her high-water mark for a single performance is £2,000 received in Buenos Ayres.

JAPANESE PAPER PLANT.—It is said that the introduction of European methods of manufacture threatens to destroy the distinctive qualities of Japanese paper. It is a wood or bark paper, made from several plants, having no English names, which are cultivated for the purpose. In Japan its varieties are numerous and its uses innumerable. It serves for window lights, and for light partitions between rooms. Brilliantly coloured lanterns are made of it, and umbrellas are covered with it. It is used for printing bank-notes. Oiled, it makes waterproof garments, and covered with paste it forms tapestries. When varnished it can be made to imitate Cordovan leather. Handkerchiefs, cords and pressed articles resembling papier-mâché are among the things formed from this most useful paper.

A NEW story of Lord Roseberry that he arranged to meet a friend at a country railway station, the two intending to travel in the same direction. The train arrived, but his friend was still over half a mile away, though his carriage could be seen coming as fast as the horses could gallop. Lord Roseberry vainly entreated the station master to hold the train for a few minutes and as a last resort sat down on the rails in front of the engine, refusing to budge until his friend was on the platform,

Owing to the London County Council having acquired our premises, the Office of this paper is now removed to 50-52, Ludgate Hill, E.C. (over Hudson Brothers), to which all communications should now be addressed.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

LEAH.—The Greeks had no family names.

SCHOLAR.—Surnames were not in use in Britain till about 1,000 A.D.

ASTRONOMER.—The division of the day into twelve equal parts did not come into general usage till about the middle of the second century, B.C.

CURIOS ONE.—The yearly revenue of Her late Majesty, Queen Victoria, was estimated at £385,000, or £1,300 daily; while that of the Emperor William's is £730,000 or £1,600 daily.

A PERPLEXED MOTHER.—The daughter of a duke should be addressed as Lady Mary A. by the upper classes, as Lady Mary by intimate friends, and as "My Lady" or "Your Ladyship" by all other classes.

LASCELLES.—(1) Your friend is quite right; the lady of highest rank (or the chief lady guest) leads the way; the hostess follows last. (2) Yes. Your card should be left. Your daughter need not have separate cards of her own; her name should be printed on your card underneath your name.

R. A. M.—It is taken from quarantine, forty, that being the number of days that infected vessels had to avoid intercourse with the shore or with other ships. At present the precise number of days varies with special regulations.

ANXIOUS ONE.—In this instance your friends are quite right. It is not proper to correspond with a man of whom you know so little; indeed, I do not think he should have requested you to do so unless he is fond of you and intends to ask you to marry him. In the meantime, I would advise you to explain to him in a kind, gentle way exactly what your friends suggest. If he is a sensible fellow he will not be hurt or take offence. He will quite understand, and probably like you all the better for being straightforward in the matter.

HEATHER.—The post of factory inspector is a Government appointment, and application should be made to the Home Secretary. There are several women factory inspectors in Great Britain whose salaries range from £600 to £300 a year. There is no special course of training required, but a Civil Service examination has to be passed. The limits of age for candidates are twenty-one and forty. On an average two vacancies occur annually.

CONSTANCE.—A solution of oxalic acid, citric acid, or tartaric acid, is attended with the least risk, and may be applied to paper and prints without fear of damage. These acids take out writing ink, but do not touch printing. To take out the writing-ink which has evidently been on the paper some time, try a solution of muriate of tin, two drachms, and water four drachms. Apply with a camel-hair brush, and when the writing has disappeared, sponge the paper with cold water and dry carefully.

HYACINTH.—A very good formula for house plant liquid fertilizer is as follows: one tea-spoonful nitrate of soda, one tea-spoonful sulphate of potash, one tea-spoonful acid phosphate or four tea-spoonfuls fine ground bone, in two gallons of water. Use this liquid in place of water once or twice each week, according to the poroseness of the soil or the growth of the plants.

GEOLOGIST.—Some of the vast changes which the face of the earth has undergone are indicated by the recent discovery in the small lakes scattered among the extinct volcanoes of Auvergne, in France, of the survival of certain forms of marine animals. Salt plains exist there whose deposits were formed before volcanic forces upheaved the surrounding rocks and created mountain peaks and craters.

WILLING ONE.—Two things are against your becoming a hospital nurse at present—your age, and the fact of your being under-sized. It is no use your applying at any hospital for at least a year; and even then you will only be eligible for a children's hospital. That you are strong and healthy, willing to work hard, and have a thorough knowledge of housework, all count in your favour. When the time comes for you to send in your application, write again and we will give you the addresses of suitable institutions where training is to be had; meanwhile, make up your mind to remain at home and take your share in the house duties. You cannot have too much experience in this respect.

LONG LIVE THE KING!

How shall we honour her best,
The Mother-monarch grand,
Whose sceptre now doth rest
In a new and untried hand?
How shall we honour her best?—
In the joyful honouring
Of her last and her best bequest
To the land that she loved—the King!

How shall we sing her praise
Who, when her course was run,
Left, for the coming days,
A gift to the land, her son?
Thus shall we sing her praise,
When the silver clarions ring,
And the herald's trumpets raise
A shout to our lord, the King!

How shall she still live on,
She whom the world calls dead!
Bone of her bone, a son
Shall reign in the mother's stead.
So shall she still live on,
In the life from which hers did spring,
Let myriads shout, as one,
Long live the Queen—in the King!

THE ONLOOKER.

DORA.—The hostess should receive her guests in the reception room in this instance, and should shake hands with each guest in the order of their arrival. The door of the room should remain open, and she should stand within the doorway, where she should remain until the principal guests have arrived.

A PARTICULAR ONE.—A nice way of cooking a cabbage is to quarter it, removing the outer leaves and the heart, and put into plenty of boiling salted water. Boil constantly until tender, take into a colander to drain, and make a cream sauce of one tablespoonful of flour and a little salt in a cup of milk. Mix the flour with a little cold milk, then stir in the rest of the milk and let boil till it thickens, then put in the cabbage and let it come to a boil again. Allow a heaped tablespoonful of salt to each half gallon of water, and skim the cabbage several times. If you want your cabbage "extra nice" add a bit of nice sweet butter to your sauce. From twenty to forty minutes should cook the cabbage, depending upon size.

VOLUNTARY WORKER.—Probably half the men who have made their way in the world have succeeded at some time or other because they were not afraid of turning out gratuitous work. It is the easiest way of showing what you have

in you. The world will readily accept free work that is sufficiently well done, and if the work is really well done men will find the fact out, and then pay may follow. Work on the chance of its finding appreciation is not of course readily possible in most professions or callings. The most obvious instance to the contrary is journalism. Many a successful man who would give to writers the advice "Never write without being paid for what you write" has in other days written reams of copy for the sake of writing, and has scattered them broadcast among editors, so that those whom his writing concerned might find out what he could do. The work was liked, became useful, became indispensable—that is, became valuable—and so the aspirant ended by finding himself because he had not been afraid of giving himself away. Something like that often occurs in practical life. A young man takes to a certain kind of work freely because he likes it, because it expresses himself, and he works at it unselfishly apart from his ordinary occupation. It never occurs to him that what he is doing has a value in a worldly sense. But he continues, makes the work his own, succeeds until his influence cannot be withdrawn, and by-and-by all who are witnesses agree that to this work he can most suitably devote his life as a paid worker, who none the less is known to be a labourer beyond price. The very unselfishness that causes a man to plunge into an enterprise, giving all he has gratis, wins confidence, assures sincerity, and makes the worker too valuable to be lost. Talk of not doing anything for nothing! Why, if the unpaid work of the world, material and moral, were stopped, a greater loss would take place than would be suffered from the stoppage of paid work. The finest expressions of human character appear in the form of unpaid work—vast and beneficent overflow after mere necessity has been satisfied.

PRETTY PENELOPE.—If the wedding reception takes place in the afternoon and light refreshments are given, the arrangements may be similar to those for a large afternoon "At Home" with the addition of wedding-cake and champagne. The tea and coffee should be served by the maid servants and handed round by them. At these weddings tea ceremony is, to a certain extent, dispensed with, and this is a great advantage over the formal wedding breakfast. The bride and bridegroom are not always able to be present at a wedding tea, but the reception is held just the same, after they have left. Refreshments should be served in the dining-room on a long table at one end of the room, and may consist of sandwiches of various kinds, savoury, and sweets; cakes, bread and butter, fancy biscuits, pastry fingers, fruit, ices, etc.

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